

KENT CANOES' BEGINNERS GUIDE TO KAYAKING & CANOEING

So you're interested in having a go at kayaking or canoeing?

But where do you begin?

There is so much literature and products on the market that it can be very confusing when you're a novice so **Kent Canoes** have written this article to help you make the right choices and enjoy your time on the water. This **free article** covers:

- **How to Get Started** – Courses / Demo Boats / Clubs
- **Boats & Equipment** – Boat Classifications & equipment choice
- **Where to Paddle** – A Brief Guide to Kent and the South East
- **Appendix** – List of some of the BCU Affiliated Canoe Clubs in the SouthEast.

How to Get Started

The first thing you need to consider is what type of paddling you are interested in.

- a) Do you like the idea of touring down a river and enjoying the environment and the wildlife?
- b) Do you prefer the idea of having some fun on the water, be it in surf down at a beach or on a whitewater river?
- c) Perhaps you want to do a bit of both.
- d) You may be considering taking up the sport for personal fitness.
- e) Do you want to be competitive?

These are all questions you need to ask yourself before you begin getting on the water.

There are various ways to get you started so you can find out what style of paddling will suit you:

Courses

Kent Canoes run a range of courses with our BCU qualified coaches. They are one of the best ways to discover what style of paddling will suit you. You will gain skills and confidence to help you progress.

Taster sessions are there for you to have a go for half a day with a qualified instructor present. These can include kayaking, sea kayaking or open canoeing. A safety briefing and some basic skills will be taught along with a short journey. Ideal for families or young children who will not cope with a full days tuition.



Open Canoeing (Canadian style canoe) courses are generally taught so you paddle in tandem with someone else in the boat to begin with. Again they cover control and safety combined with a trip to practice the new skills you have been taught. These boats are very stable and comfortable so appeal to a variety of people, some of which may be more nervous of being in a kayak.

Kayaking courses will teach you how to get control of the boat and manoeuvre it safely on the water. Most kayaking courses are run with general purpose 'closed cockpit' kayaks. The skills you learn in this style of boat can be applied to other types of kayaks like Touring Kayaks and Sit-On-Tops plus Whitewater kayaks. From this you can progress on to more specific courses like whitewater or sea kayaking.





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Trips are an opportunity for you to explore the rivers or sea, safe in the knowledge you have a qualified instructor with you as a guide.
They are a great way to improve your paddling skills and enjoy the company of other like-minded people.
Generally suited to older children and adults. Most will require a minimum standard of paddling experience before you can attend

It's often hard to decide what style of paddling you prefer but by doing a course you likely to confirm what you are interested in and go away with a clearer mind on which boats to look at if you want your own.

Further Kent Canoes information on our courses, taster sessions and trips can be found on our website www.kentcanoes.co.uk including course articles, dates, booking information and prices.

Demo Boats

Kent Canoes have a range of demonstration boats that you can try for a small fee, which is refundable when you purchase a boat from us.
This will allow you to test the style of boat you are interested in before purchasing one for yourself. It is recommended to paddle the boat a couple of times so you are more familiar with it the second time round and can make a more informed choice. Kent Canoes will make sure you get the right advice to ensure you are trying the right boat for you. Don't try too many as you may confuse yourself, two to three different ones are normally more than enough to help you decide.



Canoe Clubs / Scouts

There are loads of canoe clubs across the country and this is one of the best ways to get started. Most canoe clubs have a website so do a little research before you pay your membership to ensure they can provide what you want. There is no point joining a club that focuses on Marathon Racing when you are interested in white water kayaking and vice versa.

A good way to find a club in your local area is to visit the British Canoe Union website www.bcu.org.uk and those clubs registered with the BCU are listed by area so you can get in contact with your local club. See appendix for clubs in Kent.

It can be a great way to meet like minded adults and children.

Children can also join a local scout group as many now do canoeing and kayaking.

Boats and Equipment

There are boats to suit all abilities, ages, shapes and sizes. Kent Canoes can advise you further but you need to consider your height, weight, build, leg length and foot size before buying a boat.

The range of kayaking and canoeing products on the market is immense and can be very confusing to a beginner. You may decide you would rather have your own boat. There is a real advantage to having your own equipment as you know it fits well and is suited to the type of paddling you are doing.

Having your own boat means you get familiar with how it handles and responds. It also means it is set up for you so you don't have to spend time adjusting every time you paddle because the person who used it before had it set up differently. People with their own boats tend to progress faster and have more confidence on the water.

Boat Definitions:

KAYAKS:



These are boats where you use a **double bladed paddle**. They generally have a '**closed cockpit**' for use with a spraydeck and you paddle in a '**seated**' position

CANOES:



These are boats where you use a **single-bladed paddle**. They have an **open deck** and you paddle in a **seated or kneeling** position.

Boat Classifications:

a) General Purpose Kayaks



General Purpose kayaks are a good entry-level kayak for beginners. Most are made of rotomolded plastic which is tough and durable. Their simple design allows you to practice your skills as you are learning on flat water. They do not have the safety features to allow you to progress to more advanced waters.

Most general-purpose kayaks allow you to learn to roll more easily because of the simpler hull shape. They are stable and manoeuvrable and tend to be around 3m or more in length. Some come with a skeg (a drop down static rudder) to help you stay in a straight line whilst you are learning.

These tend to be one of the cheapest styles of boats on the market starting from £350 upwards.

Our recommendations: The Pyranha Master TG, the Perception Arc/Sparc or the Dagger Legend Series (RPM / Redline / Infrared).

b) Whitewater Kayaks



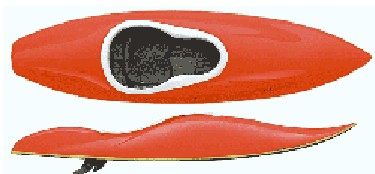
Whitewater Kayaks can vary and are often subcategorised but in general they tend to be shorter and have greater strengthening and safety features. Made of rotomolded plastic, their designs are much more advanced so the hull performs better and is quicker and more manoeuvrable on white water. As a result they can be more ‘twitchy’. However, their interior outfitting tends to be much more comfortable and adjustable so that you can get a snug fit to gain control of the boat. They can be also be used in surf or on flat water too but as they can be shorter, less than 3m in length, they are not ideal for long trips as they are too slow and don’t track very well in a straight line. These boats can range in price depending on the design and outfitting but generally start from £450 and go up to £900. Our recommendations: The Dagger GT series, the Dagger Mamba or Pyranha Connect 30 range.

c) Playboats / Freestyle Boats



Playboats or Freestyle boats as they are otherwise known are the shortest kayaks on the market. Designed to be able to do tricks (spins, flips, cartwheels etc) on both flat water and moving water they are as a result the lowest in volume and space and stability. Many playboaters suffer from cramped legs and feet but tolerate it as the boats are so much fun. The idea is for you to become part of the kayak and use your body weight and paddle to flip the boat around. They are not ideally suited as a first boat despite their convenient size. However, many do buy them, as they are only interested in learning to playboat. They do restrict what else you can do as they cannot cope with distance at all and restrict you to certain grades of whitewater depending on your ability. These boats are at the cutting edge of kayak design are generally more expensive between the £500 to £850 marker. Our recommendation: The Dagger G-Force, the Agent or the Pyranha Rev.

d) Surf Kayaks



Surf kayaks are specialist boats designed purely for surfing. Their shape and seating position is designed to maximise speed, lift and performance on a wave. They can be rotomolded but the best performers are fibreglass composite or carbon surf kayaks, which are lighter, more rigid and glide through the water better but can be expensive. If you are specifically interested in surf kayaking then these boats are ideal but they do not function on flat or white water. They are ideally suited to someone with kayaking experience already, as they are difficult to roll and handle at first. Our recommendation: Seek professional advice

e) Touring Kayaks



Touring kayaks can range from 10' in length to 15' or even 17' in length. They can be made of glass composite or rotomolded plastic. Shorter touring kayaks tend to suit inland rivers and lakes and the longer ones estuaries and the sea because they are faster and can cope with the tides and wind better. However, most will cope with both depending on the conditions. They often have 1-2 storage compartments, which are sealed by a bulkhead and provide stowage as well as buoyancy during a capsize. Some come with skegs or foot controlled rudders for extra steering control. Singles, tandems and some triples are available.

The cockpits can be larger so access in and out of the boats is easier and you don't feel so confined. There is often plenty of legroom too. Most have comfortable seats and backrests, some of which are very adjustable so you can spend hours comfortably in the boat.

Touring kayaks are becoming increasingly the most popular kayaks on the market. They suit a wide range of paddlers so are ideal for beginners and advanced people wanting to explore the rivers and the sea. They are not suited to white water.

Prices start from about £450.

Our recommendation: The Dagger Blackwater 10.5 expedition, the Venture Kayak Easky range or the Perception Carolinas.

f) Sea Kayaks



Sea Kayaks look similar to touring kayaks but they tend to be longer than touring kayaks and start in length from about the 16' marker. They also tend to be narrower and a tighter fit in the cockpit so you gain more control of the boat. There are different shapes of hull and deck; each suited to the waters they were designed for. These generally include 'Greenland or Inuit shapes', 'American' or 'British' sea kayaks. British and Greenland Sea kayaks tend to be the most popular in this country as the shapes suit our waters and our wind. They are available as singles or tandems.

Sea kayaks can be made of rotomolded (RM) plastic, composite glass or carbon kevlar. RM Sea kayaks have developed a huge amount in the last few years and are now competing strongly with the popular light and rigid composite and carbon Kevlar Sea kayaks. RM Sea kayaks' main appeal is their durability. They can cope with scratches and scrapes, pebbly beaches and rocks. However, they can be slightly heavier.

Sea kayaks today tend to be more stable than they used to so novices can try sea kayaking straight away in flat conditions however it is recommended that tuition is taken before exploring the coastline as there are many safety issues to consider.

Sea kayaks start from around £900 upwards, migrating in to the thousands when you get to kevlar kayaks.

Our recommendation: the Valley Aquanaut, the Perception Essence or the P&H Capella.

g) Sit-on-Top Kayaks



Sit-on-top kayaks are truly recreational kayaks. As the name suggests you sit on the rather than in them like touring kayaks. They range in length from about 2.5m in the solos and up to 4.5m on the tandems. They are self-draining through scupper holes, so any water that comes on board simply drains out. If you fall off them you simply climb back on again with no need to empty the boat from water. So there is no fear of entrapment.

Designs vary from short flat hulled ones which manoeuvre well but are slow so can't cover distances, to longer v-hulled ones with rudders that track well and are faster so you can cover further distances and cope with more moderate water conditions. They are also surf specific sit-ons as well as ones for juniors and women and those wanting to kayak fishing. Tandems and 3-person sit-on are also available.

Sit-on-tops can be an ideal boat to get started with as kids and adults a can use them in a relatively safe manner. They suit all abilities but you are restricted by their performance with how much you can do in them. They suit rivers, lakes and the sea so are very versatile but tend to suit fair-weather paddlers as you are quite exposed on them and cannot avoid getting wet.

Prices start from around the £300.

Our recommendation: The Perception Scooter range or the Perception Gemini tandem.

h) Fishing Kayaks



Fishing kayaks have really developed over the last couple of years. They can vary from 'closed cockpit' kayaks to 'sit-on-top' kayaks and are generally very stable with a multitude of features to wet any fisherman's' appetite. Designed for rivers, lakes and the sea, fishing kayaks allow you to get those fishing spots others can't reach. They can be used as a recreational kayak too when not being used for fishing.

They can vary in length from about 8' upwards.

Prices range from around £500 up to £1000 and beyond depending on the fishing specific features it has.

Our recommendation: The Perception Freedom Angler, the Ocean Kayak Prowler Angler.

i) Open Canoes



Open canoes (or Canadian Canoes as they are otherwise known) are the 'pack-horses' of the canoe & kayak world. They are generally stable, comfortable and efficient boats, which can vary from solo canoes to ones big enough to take a family of four. Their development over the years has produced a range of canoes to suit most waters and most peoples needs. Solid, robust triple layer polyethylene canoes are ideally suited for centres, whitewater or those on a budget. But they can be heavy. Royalex canoes are lighter, can be more efficient and easier to handle. They can be used on flat water and moving water. Kevlar open canoes are some of the lightest open canoes on the market. They have a very rigid and efficient hull but it can be prone to damage more than the other types. They are ideal for those wanting a light boat to handle or those travelling distances or racing.

They can vary in length from around 14' up to 18' or more.

Prices can start from £650 for polyethylene open canoes up to several thousand for carbon kevlar canoes.

Our recommendations: the Venture Canoes Prospector 15, the Wenonah Prospectors or the Nova Craft Bob Special.

j) Marathon/Racing Canoes & Kayaks



These specialised canoes and kayaks are the ultimate design for speed and efficiency. Suited to those wishing to follow a competitive career in the sport or those who like pushing themselves physically.

They can vary in construction (from polyethylene to full carbon), and in design according to the discipline and your experience. Available in singles to quads.

These are the least stable boats on the market but are fast in a straight line for sprinting or marathon distance. With a long pedigree and their usage in the Olympics, racing kayaks and canoes are very popular in many canoe clubs who compete at different levels.

They can be expensive so be prepared to part with well over £1000 for a racing boat.

Our recommendation: seek specialist advice.

Clothing & Other Equipment

Kent Canoes recommend you always wear appropriate clothing to paddle in to keep you warm and dry. Wetsuits, thermals with dry tops and trousers or a dry-suit are advisable. Avoid wearing cotton, as it will chill your skin when wet and takes a long time to dry. Good footwear (wetsuit boots or shoes) is essential and a helmet is advisable if you wish to progress to moving water. A buoyancy aid is a necessity for both adults and children. It must fit correctly and be appropriate for your weight and be worn at all times.

There is apparel and equipment suited to each discipline of the sport so it is important you get advice from us so you make the right purchase. Ring the shop on 01732 886688 or come in to try a range of products on to make sure it's comfortable and suited to your needs and budget.



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Where to Paddle

Here are some suggestions of where to paddle in Kent and the southeast.

Please be aware you need a license to go many inland waterways. A license can be obtained from the Environment Agency (enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk) or through the British Canoe Union (BCU) where you can apply online at www.bcu.org.uk. Not all waterways are accessible, as many are privately owned in this country. The coastline and estuaries are generally accessible although there may be restrictions at ports and naval or military bases. Do not presume you can go on any stretch of water. Ask the BCU, who negotiate access rights, where you can and can't go. Be respectful of other users of the river and the environment and take any rubbish home with you.

1. The River Medway

70 miles worth of possible paddling! If you paddle anywhere between Allington Lock and Tonbridge it is non-tidal. For flat water paddling the stretch from Maidstone to East Farleigh is pleasant but the stretch from Yalding to Tonbridge is prettier although you do have to portage around some of the weirs. For some whitewater visit Yalding weir. It is automated and can have some fierce openings when there has been some rainfall. Below the bridge there are some ideal waves and eddies to practice on for novices. At East Peckham there is Sluice weir with some white water in winter and the canoe shoot—great fun for all paddlers who are brave enough!

Below Allington it is tidal and it is recommend that you contact the Environment Agency for tide times so you don't get caught out! It's pleasant around Upnor and a little more sheltered from the wind. You go past Upnor Castle too! Good birdlife. Beyond Upnor the estuary spreads out with some small islands of interest but very shallow waters on a low tide.

The Environment Agency have recently spent a lot of money putting in access points, facilities and parking for kayakers and canoeists on the River Medway from Tonbridge to Allington. Notably a shower and toilet facility at Allington lock. For further information contact the Lock Keeper on 01622 752864.



2. Leybourne Lake

A flat water lake ideal for beginners and improvers. Found at Leybourne Country Park off the A228 near Snodland, (off M20 junction 4). Easy access to the water and cheap too but access can be seasonal. Good for Open Canoeing, recreational touring. Clean water the majority of the time, but you do have to watch out for scuba divers! Contact Leybourne Lake Country Park for further information.

3. Royal Military Canal

The canal stretches 28 miles across remote parts of Romney Marsh from Hythe to Iden lock, near Rye. A man-made canal built to obstruct Napoleon and then used for commercial purposes, it is now used purely for recreational purposes. Ideal for open canoeing and touring. Pretty countryside but you do have to portage round some locks. There are restrictions on access to some parts of the canal. Contact Hythe Borough Council for further information.



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4. Joss Bay

Found in East Kent near Margate and Broadstairs, this bay is relatively small but does receive some swells suitable for kayak surfing. It can be quite unclean surf but it is fun never the less if a little cold in winter! If you want to check out the surf before you go then visit www.magicseaweed.com.

5. Camber Sands

Camber Sands at Camber near Rye is a huge, dune-backed beach that is worth a day trip. Various water sports take place here although they are restricted to a particular zone of the beach (generally where the beach turns pebbly) The surf here can be good if you get the right winds and tides in combination. Two hours before high tide is best. At low tide the beach stretches for miles. For more information on tides visit www.bbc.co.uk/weather.



6. The Stour

The River Stour winds its way through some beautiful countryside for 19 miles from Canterbury to Fordwich to Pegwell Bay where it meets the English Channel. Some parts are only navigable by small craft like canoes and kayaks but there are restrictions on this river. For more information on the Stour and access please contact Peter Yates, the BCU Access Officer for the Stour at petery@jaotech.com.



7. The 'Eastern' Rother

From historic Rye to Bodiam Castle, the River Rother is one of the finest rural rivers in England. A river that has been navigated for centuries is one of two in the South with the name 'Eastern' Rother. It meets the English Channel at Rye. One of the Cinque Ports, which was first chartered in the 12th Century. Here the river is tidal but upstream it is not and the river runs peacefully through the High Weald to the 12th Century ruin of Bodiam Castle.

8. Faversham Creeks and the Swale

Padding out from Oare on a high tide you can explore the creeks and go out in to the Swale Estuary to see the seals, which pop their heads up from time to time to see what you're doing. The tides can be strong here so planning and some experience is essential.



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APPENDIX

Some of the BCU affiliated clubs in Kent & the southeast are listed below. For a full list go to www.bcu.org.uk

- Bewl Canoe Club- www.bewlcanoeclub.co.uk
- Bromley Canoe Club – www.bromleycanoeclub.co.uk
- Croydon Active Paddlers – www.croydonactivepaddlers.org.uk
- Cuckmere Valley Canoe Club – www.cvcc.org.uk
- Hailsham & Eastbourne Canoe Club – www.hfcc.org.uk
- Hastings & District Canoe Club – www.hastingscanoeclub.org.uk
- Maidstone Canoe Club – www.maidstonecanoeclub.org.uk
- Martlet Kayak Club – www.martletkayakclub.org.uk
- Meridian Canoe Club – www.meridiancanoeclub.com
- Pirates Canoe Club – www.piratescanoeclub.com
- Purley Canoe Club – www.purleycanoeclub.co.uk
- Tandridge Canoe Club – www.tandridgecanoe.co.uk
- Tonbridge Canoe Club – www.tonbridgecanoeclub.org.uk
- Tower Hamlets Canoe Club – www.towerhamletscanoeclub.co.uk
- Whitewater Action Medway – www.whitewateraction.co.uk

Thank you for reading this article. We hope it helps and encourages you in the sport of canoeing and/or kayaking.

The shop at Kent Canoes holds a one of the largest ranges of canoes, kayaks and equipment in the South-East. We have been established for over 15 years and aim to provide you with everything you need to get you on the water.



The team at Kent Canoes are here to help you and give you impartial advice.



Grant Scamell
Proprietor / L5 Coach



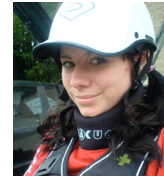
Estelle Leyshon
Retail Manager



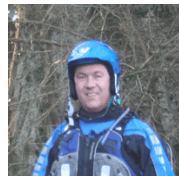
Chris Hilditch
Website/Sales



Paul Abel
Sales



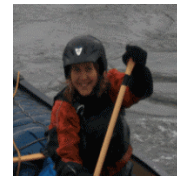
Hannah Whitcombe
Sales



Rob Davis
L3 Coach



Stuart Kenny
L3 Coach



Jo Kenny
L3 Coach



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