

# What is Open Canoeing?



Open canoes, what are they? Why are they so popular? Why on earth would you want one?

Simple questions and ones that I will try to answer in this article, and then in the next ones, I will divulge various tidbits of skills and knowledge, which will hopefully take you a long way to becoming a canoeist.

modern materials comes the ability to make smoother flowing curves, but overall the shape has remained the same for hundreds of years.

Why this shape? Well as I have just said they are extremely versatile. The hull shape gives them stability whether they are loaded or unloaded, the ability to carry one person or many.

World. But most commonly they are known from the North American continent and especially all over Canada, hence they got their other name "Canadian Canoe". The original European explorers and traders used them to get about, the local Indians and trappers used them to get about. The ability to be able to travel up rivers, sail across lakes, negotiate rapids down river and be carried around anything you couldn't or didn't want to paddle made them the de-rigour possession.



So, what is an open canoe? Think of the native American Indians.... Think of their canoes. Got it? Well that's an open canoe. Since that time, the general shape and design hasn't altered that drastically. There has been no need too, as this shape is so versatile as it is. Yes, the materials have altered and with

(depending on the size). The fact that they can deal with moving water, waves, wind, rocks, rapids, flat water all with consummate grace. And above all they are designed to be carried around anything that you don't want to paddle.

These design features are why they were used extensively all over the



The Hudson Bay company that traded beaver furs for export to the European hat market used them extensively to be able to get up river to

trade goods for the beaver skins, they used 25 and 30 foot long canoes with teams of 8 to 12 men paddling them. These huge canoes similar to their modern brethren could be poled upriver, sailed across and down wind, repaired on the go and carried easily along with their cargos.

This knowledge of the water ways and the skills to make them move easily and quickly around them was then used in smaller canoes for travel and recreation. These skills were then developed and became the sport we know now as canoeing.

This versatility has made them so popular as anyone with a modicum of skill can get to places that they couldn't by any other transport. Link this with the fact that they are environmentally friendly and quiet, they then are the perfect choice to get out wilderness camping when used alongside bushcraft skills.

Being able to travel great distances relatively effortlessly and carrying a fair amount of kit makes them invaluable as a tool to really explore a wilderness. Multi day

trips can be done with a greater level of comfort. As larger amounts of food and kit can be taken with you, also the areas that you can get to in a given length of time is



increased. Gorges that have no footpaths into them, lakes that have islands to explore, wildlife you can creep up to and observe silently.

By using a canoe I have experienced some of the best moments I have ever had while out in the wilds, watching salmon and trout leaping up rapids right next to me, just floating, letting the world go by, as an osprey is diving for its food, having dolphins and seals playing alongside my canoe. And all this while carrying my camp with me.

One of best things about the canoe as a bushcraft tool is that it is your transport, your gear carrier and your fishing vessel all in one. With a little ingenuity you can use it as a base for your shelter and bed.

My first introduction to wilderness canoeing was along the Caledonian canal in 1990. We were going from Inverness to Fort William, two people to a canoe (tandem), all our gear in the boats and we had put sails up as the wind was blowing in the right direction. We sailed for about 3 hours and saw a gorgeous beach, no houses or roads nearby and we decided that though it was a short day we were going to camp there.

Fire set and burning nicely, pots hanging over the fire, socks drying on tripod made from sticks and fish being prepared, I couldn't and still can't explain how amazing that first night felt. Changed my impressions of canoeing and camping for ever.



You should try Canoeing. Get the basic skills to travel where you want to go. And then take your camping afloat. Try it and I promise you; you will never look back again.