

SPORTS

Small boats BIG on fun

By Luke Clayton
May 5, 2008

When paddling small steams or backwaters, I am often reminded of the words of Thoreau in his famous novel *A Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers*: “We seemed to be embarked on the placid current of our dreams.”

There truly is something special about floating or paddling down a slow moving stream or tranquil stretch of shoreline of a lake or pond. I am continually amazed as the sights and sounds encountered when I penetrate an unpopulated stretch of country via the horsepower I supply to the paddles. Rounding that first bend of a stream or river on a float trip of several miles is the height of adventure; it's a trip into the unknown, an experience that's getting more difficult to find these days.

I'll never forget my first long float trip on the Sabine River in east Texas several years ago. The original plan was for my two brothers-in-law and I to launch a rather heavy V-bottom aluminum boat at an intersecting road, fire up the little 7.5 HP outboard and run upstream about ten miles, then let the current float us back to our launch point. Our plan would have worked perfectly IF the ancient little engine had started; it didn't!

After thirty minutes of jerking the pull rope, cleaning the spark plug, priming the carburetor, and possibly uttering a few words we shouldn't, we gave up on the idea of going UPSTREAM.

Our option was to float about 24 miles downstream to the next highway. One of my brothes-in-law volunteered to meet us at the downstream bridge just before dark and Sam and I pushed away from the bank, allowing the sluggish, muddy waters of the Sabine to carry us into some truly remote east Texas backcountry. Our boat was heavy and much better suited to use on a lake but thanks to a good current and plenty of water depth, we were able to keep it afloat and moving the entire trip, except the short breaks along the sandbars where we stopped for lunch and to do a little fishing. Along the way, we saw feral goats, hogs, deer and even a few fellows fishing off the bank that gave us flashbacks to the movie *Deliverance*! This trip served to get me 'hooked' to the sights sounds encountered while floating remote streams and rivers.

Since that day close to a quarter-century ago, I've enjoyed many such trips on a variety of rivers and streams from the Rocky Mountain high country to the Hill Country of Texas. I am fortunate to live very close to a some very secluded backwaters created by several gravel pits that, when water levels are at or above normal, allow me to paddle my Nucanoe, a very stable craft that is a cross between a kayak and canoe, from one of the ponds to the next.

This little 12-foot craft is unsinkable and comfortably allows me and one passenger access to some prime fishing waters that would be impossible to reach with larger, heavier boats. It also serves as the perfect duck boat for gaining access to those remote backwater areas during duck season.

Boats such as my Nucanoe, kayaks and canoes have become more popular today than ever. I think many of us simply wish to enjoy our time outdoors as a time to relax and unwind from the fast paced lifestyles that have become part of living in today's world.

Please don't conceive my love of small boats to be a bash on bigger craft. Few weeks go by that I don't enjoy the luxury of fishing with a guide in a big, roomy boat with an engine that cranks out more horsepower than my wife's car. This has become a big part of what I do as an outdoors

writer and I enjoy every minute of my time in these big luxurious fishing boats.



Luke paddles to shore in his Nucanoe, a very stable craft that offers the best attributes of a kayak and canoe.
photo by Luke Clayton

But, I also enjoy sliding my 85-pound Nucanoe in the back of my pickup and launching it myself from just about anywhere along the bank of my favorite pond or stream. I've also discovered another big plus: The 'push' needed to get me from point A to B is provided by a paddle, via energy transferred by my arms, not gasoline and I KNOW you've been to the pump lately!

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN USING SMALL CRAFT

NEVER EXCEED THE RECOMMENDED WEIGHT LIMITS OF YOUR CRAFT

KEEP A LOW CENTER OF GRAVITY AND REMAIN IN THE CENTER OF THE CRAFT

AVOID LAUNGING INTO OPEN WATERS DURING WINDY CONDITIONS

WEAR A COMFORTABLE FLOATION DEVICE

To learn more about the Nucanoe, go online to www.nucanoe.com

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