



Kayak fishing sees popularity surge

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This summer I stood at the Adirondack Museum marveling at the ingenuity of an authentic Inuit kayak. The boat at the museum is a traditional craft, covered in what I presume was sealskin over a wooden frame, made with incredible craftsmanship out of simple hand tools.

Kayaks are popular with white-water paddlers because they are light, easy to paddle and maneuverable. Kayaks have an advantage over canoes because of a special skirt around the paddler that keeps them from filling with water if they get rolled over.

While white-water kayaking and sea kayaking are gaining in popularity, kayak fishing is becoming the rage. Kayak anglers range from average folks tackling fish on local waters to professional kayak tournament fishermen.

Kayaks can be quietly paddled to sneak up on fish, and they are geared up with a variety of accessories including rod holders, places for tackle, and other storage features aimed directly at the fishing market. They are also easy for the solo angler to deal with.

The kayak is the answer for an angler who typically fishes alone and has neither the storage space nor the ability to go for a full-size boat. It is also relatively light and can easily be loaded and unloaded from a vehicle.

The folks at NuCanoe, for example, have combined the attributes of the canoe and kayak by creating a sit-on-top craft that is so stable that you can actually stand on top of the thing without tipping it over. The NuCanoe design has just hit the market and is among the kayaks that are being built for outdoor sports enthusiasts, including several made for duck hunting and fishing.

Other kayak makers have models that are suitable for fishing. Folks who fish ocean species favor the sit-on-top model for several reasons. While the traditional kayak can fill with water under bad conditions unless the skirt is worn, the sit on top model won't. In addition, the sit-on-top kayak offers better access to gear and equipment than the traditional boat. Sit-on-top kayaks resemble a surfboard, and have holes to drain water out of the hull if they get slammed with a wave.

Traditional kayaks are good for around here, where most folks are not going to be fishing in rough water that ocean-going anglers encounter. Many use traditional kayaks and rig racks on the top deck for all their gear.

Some accessories are required when fishing from a kayak. Rod holders are a must, as they keep rods safe while the craft is being paddled. Kayaks can be rigged up with bait buckets, depth finders and a number of accessories found in the best bass boats.

While we don't typically catch huge fish around here, there is potential for a big pike or two. The ocean-going anglers always have a Boga grip or a gaff on board to handle a large fish, and these folks catch everything including sharks and sailfish.

Fishing styles also vary considerably with kayaks. People are out there catching everything from bass to trout in fresh water using spinning gear and fly tackle. In the salt, just about everything is fair game, from jigging near boat wrecks to trolling a bait for sailfish. Kayaks have been adapted to fishing just about any species, using any technique you prefer.

When my wife and I were in the Florida Keys, we took the two kayaks the motel had and went across the bay to an island with historical sites dating back to its use by pirates during the 1700s. The ocean kayaks were very stable and took minimal effort to get across the mile or so of water to the island. We also rented kayaks and went through the canals on another trip, where we saw a variety of shore birds.

The kayak is seeing a spike in popularity from its humble, skin-covered beginnings. If you are in the market for one of these paddlecraft, take the time to research the various kayak fishing Web sites before buying.

Rob Streeter is an outdoors columnist for the Times Union. You can reach him at rstreeter@nycap.rr.com, or send items to 961 Stoner Trail Road, Fonda, NY 12068.