

Clothing

In canoeing, it is important that clothing should protect the body without being too restrictive. There is a lot of expensive and technical kit on the market but there is no real need to rush out and buy everything all at once. Spend a little time considering what you want to use the kit for – Sea-kayaking? Competition? Touring the canals? When you hope to be paddling – balmy summer days? or through the winter with ice on your paddles? And whether your chosen kit will be adaptable to various conditions? After-all no-one wants to earn the name ‘all the gear – no idea’!

Essentials

- Buoyancy aid - various types are available, some general purpose, others specifically for whitewater, sea-kayaking, competition etc
- Helmet – essential on rivers and rough water.
- Spraydeck – nylon or neoprene. Different spraydecks fit different boats.

On top of these essentials (often supplied by a club to beginners) whatever selection of kit you choose, it will probably be a variation on the insulating layer plus waterproof/windproof layer theme.

1. An Insulating Layer – Insulation can come from several thin layers rather than one single thick layer. More dead air is trapped in and between thin layers than in one thick layer. A wetsuit can form part of this insulation, and so can synthetic thermals and fleeces.

2. A Water/Windproof Shell Layer – This is the crux of the system, ranging from waterproof (like a dry suit) for white water to a light shell for competition or fair weather.

Never canoe in bare feet and keep laces short on shoes so they can't tangle on the footrest.

Warm Weather Paddling

Specialist canoe kit is not essential on warm summer days. To start off with, wear a pair of shorts, which dry quickly when damp, a T-shirt and some form of footwear. A lightweight or short shell top will combat any wind chill. You may want to invest in some neoprene shorts, beach shoes and a synthetic thermal top.

White Water Touring/ Playboating

Base layer 'thermal' garments, worn on the torso and/or legs need to be thin, close fitting and comfortable. In colder conditions, an intermediate layer of 'fibrepile' or 'fleece' warms quickly by trapping air to provide a thermal barrier. If there is a chance of immersion or swimming, a Long John wetsuit can be worn. Wetsuits are buoyant and keep you warm if you get completely soaked. If you are sure that you won't be falling in, a wetsuit is not essential.

There are specially cut and shaped 'paddling jackets' – called 'cags' - made from coated nylon or light breathable fabric, with close fitting wrist and neck seals to stop water penetration. There is a whole range of cags on the market from those that keep just the splashes and wind off to the 'dry cag' with latex and neoprene seals.'

In very cold conditions, and for expeditions to colder climes, the full 'dry suit', which seals the water completely out, is very much appreciated.

Choice of footwear is a matter of personal preference, but for white water or winter paddling, purpose made wet suit shoes are ideal. For the hands, the 'Pogie' or 'Paddlemitt' can be a very useful accessory.

Kayak and Canoe Touring

If it's cold, dress as for white water paddling. Lots of light layers to trap air and regulate body temperature are important. Use a 'base layer' system and build on this, as weather and water conditions dictate.

For canoe paddlers, a long style 'shell' jacket, which can be easily vented, is a sound investment. Keeping the head warm and keeping the sun out of your eyes are important factors.

And, for those hot summer days on the continent – back to the shorts and T-shirt.

Possible kit list for winter

Wetsuit (sleeveless) or dry trousers and thermal leggings

Thin thermal or warm fleece top (not cotton)

Wetsuit booties

Paddling Jacket (Cag)

The following clothing would be suitable:

Thermal vest

Light fleece

Tracksuit bottoms (not cotton)

Light water-proof bottoms

Trainers or beach shoes

Possible kit list for summer

Thermal vest, light fleece, synthetic top (such as a football strip)

Nylon tracksuit trousers

Trainers or beach shoes

Light-weight wind-proof/splash-proof top

Simply increase or decrease the layers until you feel comfortable.