

Opportunities to kayak abound in Wild Rivers Country

Hank Murphy

When the ice and snow finally melts this spring, at long last it will be time to haul the kayak out of storage and plop it into one of the beautiful streams, rivers or lakes that are so abundant in Wild Rivers Country.

If you intend to navigate one of the wild rivers – the Pine, Pike or Popple – just be sure your skill level is commensurate with the degree of danger that rapidly moving water can present. Make sure to wear a flotation device and protective head gear just in case your craft overturns or collides with rocks.

An abundance of lakes, streams, and rivers allow hundreds of Wisconsinites and vacationers to enjoy the seasonal paddle sport of kayaking. Light and narrow, a shallow draft watercraft designed for speed and ease of paddling, kayaks skim across surface water with relative ease. When used correctly the double bladed paddle slips rhythmically and effortlessly into the water of lake or stream. Kayak, paddle, and navigator are nearly silent in their union of movement on lake or stream, enhancing the tranquil experience afforded by these appealing little watercraft.

The Inuit devised kayaks thousands of years ago for hunting and fishing in the northern Arctic regions. To make the frame, they used driftwood or sometimes the skeletons of whales. They fashioned the body of the craft primarily with seal skin. In the Inuit language, the word kayak literally translates to "hunter's boat." The craft's stealth capabilities allowed hunters to sneak up behind animals on the shoreline and successfully catch their prey. By the mid-1800s, the kayak became increasingly popular with Europeans.

Northeast Wisconsin offers a variety and abundance of waterways for kayakers. Forest, Florence and Marinette counties have dozens of venues for those seeking adventure and pleasure in kayak or canoe. If you are a lake kayaker, Forest

County boasts over 800 named lakes, representing over 22,000 acres of potential surface water for the paddler. Florence and Marinette counties also have abundant lakes, ranging from two to 250 acres. Any type of kayak works for leisurely paddling on a breezy day atop a Northwoods lake. Most waters are open for the public.

River kayaking, requiring a differently designed kayak, is increasing in popularity across the state. River water trails are in abundance across the Northwoods. Forest and Florence counties alone offer well over 700 miles of rivers and streams with a water surface area of nearly 2,000 acres for paddling activities. Access and take out points can be found by speaking with DNR personnel, searching county recreational websites, or paddling clubs across northern Wisconsin.

Key to the waterways of Forest and Florence counties is the Peshtigo River and its feeder streams. Other navigable rivers and feeder streams include the Wolf, the Brule, the Pine, and the Popple Rivers. Before launching your adventure on any of these waters, talk to locals, other paddlers, or the DNR about the current navigability of any river or stream. Tranquil streams can turn into challenging if not dangerous torrents during rainy weather, while dry seasons lower water levels and make excessive portaging necessary. Less experienced kayakers may want to first try out the Brule River, which has a more consistent flow than other local rivers. On the other hand, the Popple River between Morgan Lake and Highway 101 meets the expectation of expert kayakers during the spring when water is high and fast, complete with challenging rapids and white water stretches.

Whether renting or buying a kayak, take your time and find one best suited to your skill level, particular paddling venues, and amount of use. Recreational kayakers, for example, are more stable for beginners, photogra-

phers, or casual paddling on tranquil waters. They are shorter (10-12 feet) and wider in design but less maneuverable in windy conditions than longer and more narrow kayaks. Most recreational kayakers will have deck storage or lashing areas atop the craft. These areas provide space for food, drink, fishing gear, or necessities for day touring. Sea or open water kayakers are longer, up to 16 feet or more in length. The increased length and more narrow beam of sea/open water kayakers allow for better weight distribution and are normally easier to paddle than their shorter counterparts. The cost for a new recreational kayak is quite modest, starting around \$350 and can easily float into the \$400-\$500 range. Sea and open water touring kayakers easily climb to \$1,000 or more. Your double bladed paddle is your next concern. If you can, stay with composite paddles that are lighter with angle adjustments for the paddle blade. After a long day of paddling, you will thank yourself for buying the lighter paddle. Forget the wooden paddles unless you have the arms of Hercules.

If you are new to the sport, you best play it safe



Forest and Florence counties alone offer well over 700 miles of rivers and streams with a water surface area of nearly 2,000 acres for paddling activities. Access and take out points can be found by speaking with DNR personnel, searching county recreational websites, or paddling clubs across northern Wisconsin.

with any planned waterway adventure. Do not allow excitement to run ahead of reason. Kayaking looks easy, but there is a knowledge base and skills set needed by all kayakers, even those who ply tranquil lake waters. When you decide kayaking is for you, contact a local paddle club, the DNR, or a local store that sells kayaks and find a source for instruction and lessons. Fun in a kayak is largely measured by a sense of safety and self-confidence while in your kayak, boat, or canoe. As in all boating, safety precau-

tions and well developed skills help keep you safe in all paddling situations. Do not allow others to

make "go" decisions for you. Stay with what is safe for you.



Spring ... Are you READY?

ASE Certified Mechanics

- Brakes • Exhaust • Factory Scheduled Maintenance • Shocks & Struts • Steering & Alignments • Tires • Wheel Balance & Rotation • Oil Changes • A/C Services
- Wheel Bearings • Oil • Lube • Filter
- Starters • U-Joints • Ball Joints • Seals
- Batteries • Tune-Ups • Alternators
- Tie Rods • & Much More

**Complete Car Repairs
34+ YEARS**

"Same Great Service!"
Your full-service automotive repair center
Your one stop center for quality automotive repairs and maintenance is also your one stop center for seasonal savings.

Iron Mtn. Automotive & Karls Used Cars
Brakes, Exhaust, Tires & More



Carl's **USED CARS**

407 N. Stephenson Ave
Iron Mountain, MI
906-774-1040

www.ironmountainauto.com



*Prescriptions Filled
With Personal Attention*

Crandon Pharmacy

101N. Lake Ave., Crandon, WI
715-478-3313



Laona Pharmacy

4876 Mill St., Laona, WI
715-674-2635