

So You Want to Learn White Water Kayaking and/or Canoeing By Cliff Wire May 2018

Where to start.

Find and join local club or a club near the rivers you want to boat.

Cleveland's paddling club: Keelhaulers Canoe Club

www.keelhauler.org

Pittsburgh

<http://threeriverspaddlingclub.com>

Toledo

<http://www.toledorivergang.com/>

Columbus Outdoor Pursuits

<http://www.outdoor-pursuits.org/>

We all go to the same rivers. We also have several members in the Wash. DC and Cincinnati, OH areas among others as they are no further from the rivers than Cleveland, just the other side of the rivers in WV, PA & MD.

The Keelhauler Links site: <https://www.keelhauler.org/khcc/khccres.htm> will also help you find other clubs in your area.

Instruction

Cleveland & Pittsburgh have a neighborly policy that can be beneficial for the beginner: Slip Clinic & Turkey Bash instruction classes. Being a member of either group gets you the membership rate.

Research the web sites for classes – be willing to drive a few hours for a couple of weekends to take the classes. Mark your calendars for the first two weekends in June for the Slip Clinic until the actual dates are posted. Repeat for August for the Turkey Bash. Details are posted when the Pittsburgh club sets the calendar. It will also be found on the Keelhauler web page message board: <https://keelhauler.org/phpBB2/viewforum.php?f=2> Once details are posted, sign up. And then you can free the other weekend up for other stuff like family reunions and the like.

Other teaching resources:

I have no personal knowledge of these classes, but list them as a resource, and have heard good things from folks who have attended.

Riversport kayaking classes

<http://www.riversportonline.com/>

Ohiopyle Trading post

<http://www.ohiopyletradingpost.com/whitewater/kayak-lessons>

Wilderness Voyageurs

<http://wilderness-voyageurs.com/adventures/white-water-kayak-instruction-beginner/>

Madawaska Kanu Centre – several friends have gone here & praise it highly

<http://owl-mkc.ca/mkc/>

Nantahala Outdoor Center

<https://noc.com/lessons-training>

Check out this page for more information.

<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/>

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Traveling Weekends

Once you start, this is a lifestyle choice as well. You can't do this twice a year and expect to be competent. It is quite common to spend 6 or more weekends from mid march through Memorial day (peak season) on the water. Some may be day trips the in that time frame depending on your proximity to the river. Cleveland to Slippery Rock is a day trip.

To give you an idea of where you could go in the course of a year:

Ohiopyle, PA, Bloomington, MD, Summersville, WV, Hollsopple, PA, McConnell's Mill St. Park(New Castle), PA, Fayetteville, WV, Friendsville MD, Confluence, PA, Albright, WV, Rowlesburg, WV, Hendricks, WV, Elkins, WV. Some are exactly where you will be going, others are 1-10 miles from the river launch/finish points, but are the nearest town.

Map out these places. If they are too far for you, you may not be cut out for the WW lifestyle. Once you join a club and make friends, you can find car pooling partners.

Plan on camping. These tend to be small towns w/o motels, etc. and the hotels available are too far away from the river. Tents are great things if you can't sleep in your car. A 2 inch thick Thermarest is a wonderful thing with a Styrofoam Ridge Rest to go with it.

High Quality vs Low Quality events

Some commentary, not mine, but to be aware of. I post this to give you some perspective you may not be aware of. I hadn't thought of it until it was presented to me.

Yes it's your favorite cousins/niece/nephew/grandparent - graduation/birthday/etc. – you'll get about 5-10 minutes of "Hi, how you doing, congrats, what school are you going to, etc." with 200+ other folks. You can make it up another weekend if that person is really that important.

To be blunt – if your family reunion/picnic/birthday party is more important than this class, you probably don't want to learn white water kayaking. I understand the conflicts, but putting the classes off another year really just puts you another year behind. Yes I know, grandma may not be here next year. Then make a special trip the following weekend/month to really get in that visit.

Ohio boat registration.

Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources requires registration for all boats used on Ohio waters by citizens of Ohio. Else they will bust you with fines. I Don't know the rules for out of state guests. Registration costs \$20-25 at your local marine supply store. This requires that you place a sticker & the OH number on both sides of your boat. The OH numbers are 6 or 8 digits & 2 inches tall, plus the sticker is 2x2in.

Or you can use the mail in registration for \$25 for hand powered craft. This is a single sticker you place on the rear deck of your kayak. In either case, the registration lasts for 3 years expiring March 01 of the 3rd year.

<http://www.dmv.org/oh-ohio/boat-registration.php>

I've been "tested" twice, and once the officer saw my up to date sticker and that I had a PFD, it was "Have a nice day" and other pleasantries. I have heard about expensive stories (fines) for Ohioans who haven't registered boats.

I'm told Pennsylvania requires registration if you use boat launch ramps. They respect the out of state registration. Check your state for particulars.

Buying a Kayak

Use the club web sites above: Keelhauler's: <https://www.keelhauler.org/khcc/khcads.htm>

Craigslist for your wide area, approx. 300mile radius or driving limit.

Facebook – "Western Pennsylvania White water gear swap" and some other groups.

Don't buy a new boat, not worth the cost. Find a used one you can resell once you master basic skills and decide you really want to continue with the sport. There are many old school boats out there for \$100-300 – Perception Pirouette/Pirouette S, Corsica S, Overflow among others. You can resell for what you paid. Stay away from the small (approx 18in x 29in) cockpit design (Perception Dancer/Mirage, Dagger Crossfiire) (They have gone away for safety reasons – harder to exit in a rush/emergency). If you find a Perception Proline Dancer, you struck gold! It has the large (approx 19in x 33) cockpit. If you are a small woman/child, the old style Dancer could work, but still isn't the first choice.

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Also stay away from play boats/rodeo boats that have a low volume with a “duck bill” bow/stern. They have a much steeper learning curve. Make those your 2nd boat.

You will also be looking at new school Creek Boats or River Running kayaks

Old school (90's) kayaks tend to fall into the River Runner category.

Some reading on boat types.

<http://www.paddling.net/guidelines/showArticle.html?71>

<http://community.nrs.com/duct-tape/2014/05/23/choose-whitewater-kayak/>

Many models come in Small/Large or Small/Medium/Large sizes. Some sizes are based on volume (in gallons) displacement: 55, 65, 75. Others are in Lengths: 7.5, 7.8, 8.1 of feet.

Do some research on the manufacturer's website once you find something. The sizes are designed for the height/weight of the paddler. They aren't iron clad, but a guideline. Go with the larger boat if your ht/wt is borderline.

Somebody gave you this letter, talk to them about a boats suitability when you find one.

Some folks poo-poo old school boats. Ignore them. You need to get a boat to get started. After your first year of learning you can then get a new/shiny modern boat. Your first boat usually isn't the one you'll want to keep anyway, so get a cheap one. And once you show up and gain basic skills, many folks will let you try their boat at a lunch spot for a for mile on the river. They may want to try yours as well. A good way to demo a boat.

Transporting your kayak. Buying a Roof Rack

Check out the Thule & Yakima web sites for your make/model of car, then search for the part numbers online at other stores/Amazon/eBay/etc. for better pricing. I've found great deals on eBay & Craigslist. Also your local sports clubs – Cleveland Triathlon Club, Cleveland Touring Club, etc. They carry bikes and other gear on their racks, not kayaks, but the same racks. Folks are always selling stuff. New car among the reasons.

There are two parts to this – the foot gear/mounting brackets & the cross bars.

Get the widest cross bars you can not to exceed the width of your car – the width of the mirrors. 52In is the minimum width bars you really want. 58In is awesome.

I personally prefer Thule over Yakima. Thule has rectangle bars while Yakima has round. The stackers on Yakima tend to “fall” from vertical when a boat isn't attached and rest on your roof.

If you have a pickup with a cap over the bed, you can also mount 2x4's and use those.

Both manufacturers are starting to come out with more aerodynamic bars – Wing shaped, so be willing to get those.

Something to think on: It is not very fair to have a car that only carries your own boat, you need to be able to help out on a shuttle by carrying your paddling partner's boats as well. My first car was a 4door VW Jetta sedan, I could carry 4 boats on my 52” rack and drove it for 10 years.