Kayak angling on the rise

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL

A survey conducted last year for the Outdoor Industry Association Special Report on Fishing and Boating provided some eye-opening results for outdoors enthusiasts.

Not surprisingly, the leading category of boats used in the past year at 22.6 percent was pontoon and deck boats. A close second, however, at almost 21 percent, were kayaks and canoes.

If you have any doubt about the validity of this finding, make some personal observations next time you're out on one of our lakes. Nearly every other boat dock you'll see on Keowee or Hartwell will have at least one member of the plastic armada represented.

The study did not specify the use of the paddleboats. But based on the number of touring and "playing" kayaks out there, paddlers and "players" probably top the category.

However, according to Chad Hoover, pro-staff director for Upstate-based Confluence Water Sports, one of the largest manufacturers of kayaks and canoes in the country, the popularity of kayaks for fishing is on the rise.

"For years we shipped out 10 whitewater or touring kayaks for every fishing boat we made," Hoover said. "Those numbers are changing. Not because we're making less of the others, but because people are starting to discover how much fun and how challenging it is to catch fish from a kayak."

Getting started in kayak fishing is not as daunting a challenge as it may seem. At its basic point, all you need is a boat, a paddle and a fishing rod.

Like all sports and hobbies, the more dedicated you are to the sport, the more challenging you can make it and the higher the rewards.

Kayaks and canoes are easier to transport than powerboats, and nearly any publicly accessible area can be used to launch the boats. Because kayaking anglers are limited in their range to the amount of effort in paddling, kayak anglers will not be able to run all over a lake like powerboat anglers. A more limited range has the tendency to require the angler to focus their fishing efforts on smaller areas, which can really be a good thing. It's easier to figure out where and how to catch fish in a smaller area than it is a larger area.

The next revelation that anglers new to kayak fishing soon discover is the limited amount of space available when fishing from a kayak or canoe. Kayakers have demonstrated some true innovation in ways to carry additional rods and gear, but more than a couple of rods, a tackle box and a small cooler start to weigh heavily on the load.

A valuable piece of advice provided by Tommy Samuels, a Wilderness Systems pro-staff angler who also guides kayak anglers at the coast, is to make a plan for your fishing and stick with your plan.

"Kayak angling makes you think ahead of time," Samuels said. "You can't just say, 'Well, I'm going fishing.' You need to decide what species of fish you're going to target, which baits and tactics you intend to use, what areas you intend to fish, and you pretty well need to stick to that."

Another important aspect of kayak angling is safety. Frequently, kayaking anglers fish in pairs or groups, but solo outings are also common. Create a float plan. When planning the areas you intend to fish, include a start time and proposed finish time and write those times and locations down.

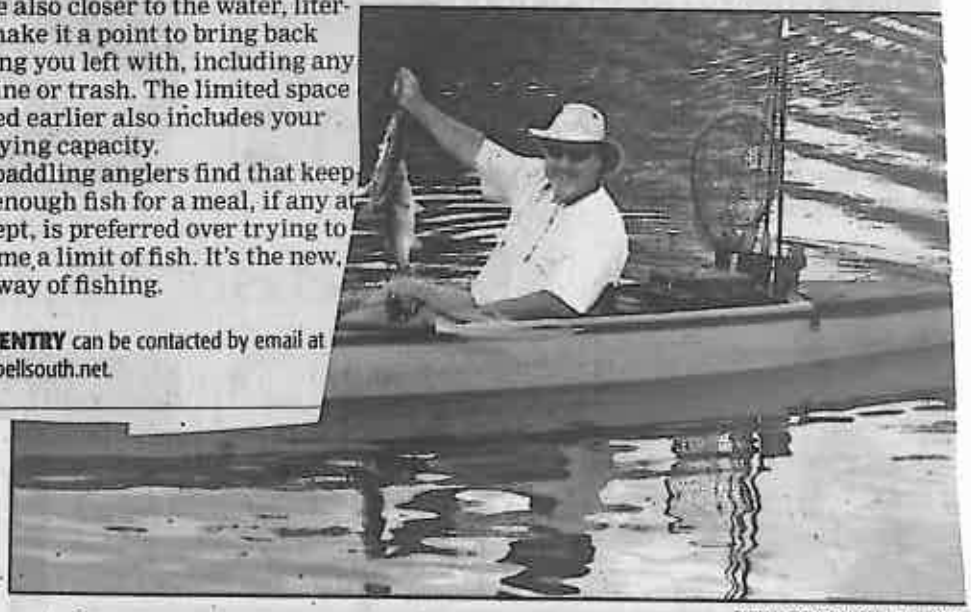
Provide this plan to a friend or loved one and make sure you check back in when the trip is over. Also, as the name implies, lifejackets are a must any time you're on the water.

One final piece of the kayak or canoe fishing puzzle is conservation. Anglers are out on the water under their own power, not relying on fossil fuels to get from one location to the other, so it's hard not to feel the bond with nature.

You are also closer to the water, literally, so make it a point to bring back everything you left with, including any fishing line or trash. The limited space mentioned earlier also includes your fish carrying capacity.

Many paddling anglers find that keeping just enough fish for a meal, if any at all are kept, is preferred over trying to bring home a limit of fish. It's the new, greener way of fishing.

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Gaining popularity as one of the most utilized watercraft on the water, many anglers are discovering the joys and challenges of fishing from kayaks.