


KAYAK FISHING

*Whether you're angling for perch, stripers or landlocks
...these versatile small boats do it all*





Like many anglers, my first watercraft was a canoe. A few years went by and I got smarter, or so I thought. I bought a fishing boat. The thrill of speed took over; I could get to the fish faster! But, now I was limited to fishing waters with boat ramps. I found I was missing those special places I fished before the bass boat, those secret spots accessible only by paddling.

So, I got into kayak fishing. New Hampshire is rich with small ponds that you can only effectively fish from a kayak. Give it a try and you'll soon find that fishing is a great way to enhance the "quiet water" experience. So what do you need to get started?

ON-THE-WATER FISHING

Long kayak fishing trips call for a comfortable seat and a stable, roomy platform for fishing. From my kayak, I can stand up to fly cast. I can paddle or use a push pole, if needed. But there are many choices out there when it comes to kayaks. Take the time to research all the makes, models and styles. Do you want a sit-in, a sit-on-top or an open kayak? Talk to people who fish from kayaks, and select what's right for you.

Manufacturers offer fishing kayaks – even some with hands-free pedal power – but the fact is, you can fish from any kayak with a few simple adjustments. Rod holders are convenient, but not a necessity. The bungee lashes on your kayak will work just fine to secure the butt of your rod and a small container with just the tackle you're going to need for that day. Keep it simple and buoyant. The mega tackle box stays at home. I have several small tackle carrying systems for each type of fish I'm targeting. This keeps the kayak neat and my tackle secure.

Lash everything down that may roll out of the boat – bait bucket, cooler, net and landing tools like pliers that you want to keep handy. A plastic crate lashed to your boat works well as a modified rod holder and accessory collect-all. You'll want an anchor of some sort

to stabilize your boat in moving water. I use a half-gallon jug filled with sand; it doesn't hang up in the rocks and slows down the drift on windy days. Be sure to have a knife at hand to cut the anchor rope if necessary for safety.

No matter what the weather, I do not get in my kayak without wearing my life jacket. I always consider the water temperature, as well as the air temperature, when I gear up for a paddle. I leave a "float plan" with someone at home. I also wear a lanyard with a whistle and a compass, and a headlamp for those occasions when the fishing is so good it's dark before I get back.

When you reach your fishing spot, you'll need a place for your paddle. I lay my paddle across my lap so I can easily make minor adjustments on the fly. But you can secure it under the bungees or attach a paddle holder accessory.

In the kayak, you are sitting right on the water. I use this to my advantage by looking for the tell-tale swirls of a rising fish and, more important, any movement on the water. Sometimes you can see a dorsal fin above the surface. From the kayak, I'm able to see the vegetation below and any baitfish or insect activity.

When you get a fish on the line, some basic kayak skills come into play. Keep your center of gravity low, and adjust your balance using your hips, not your upper body. Even the little fish might take you for a ride unexpectedly!

How are you going to transport your catch if you're keeping it for dinner? That's where I employ the cooler. Some people use the traditional stringer in the water, but it causes additional drag and may interfere with your paddling. Better to keep them on ice.

The number one advantage of fishing from a kayak is stealth. I've targeted many species of fish from my kayak. By far my favorite is panfish. I'm talking black crappie and bluegills of epic proportions. I fish some fairly small flies and lures for panfish; the kayak's stealth allows me to get close enough to make accurate casts at these fish.

by Mark Beachesne and Steve Perry



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From top: Versatile kayaks can go where other boats can't; Adventurous bass angler rewarded; The sky's the limit when it comes to accessorizing your kayak; Tranquil moment on the water.



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THE ULTIMATE TEST

All kayak fishing is fun, but catching stripers from a kayak is an incredible experience. At first, some folks have a hard enough time just paddling in the rolling waves, never mind adding fishing to the mix. So get comfortable with your kayak and your abilities. Paddling comes first, fishing is secondary.

Big stripers will get very shallow under the right conditions. A falling tide and low light is perfect for shallow striped bass fishing. For me, shallow is less than five feet. I have had fish chase my lure right up to my kayak in less than two feet of water. You better have your wits about you when that happens!

Hooking any fish over 30 inches is a huge thrill. Now, a fish hooked in shallow water will make a run for deeper water. Yes, you are going for a ride, a kayaker's "Nantucket sleigh ride!" Fighting and landing a striper from a kayak can be a huge challenge. First off, if the rod is bent, the fish is not getting away. Keep your eye on where you are drifting or being pulled to. Be prepared to separate yourself from the fish. With a good drag system, you will be able to find the balance between drag coming off the reel and you being pulled along. Needless to say, having a landing tool and pliers leashed to your kayak is a must.

Landing a striper is a true test of your kayak-fishing skills.

Mark Beauchesne is an avid angler and self-confessed kayak fishing nut. He fishes from a Native Watercraft Ultimate 14.5, sometimes sharing his kayak with his English setter.



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UPPING THE ANTE: TRY FOR LANDLOCKED SALMON FROM YOUR KAYAK

While my co-author Mark chooses the low-tech approach, I seek the advantage of using modern electronics to target New Hampshire's renowned landlocked salmon in my kayak. You see, I've been hooked on fishing since the age of 3, when I sat on my grandfather's dock, waiting with anticipation for yellow perch to yank my red-and-white bobber underwater. As the years passed, I turned to the challenge of enticing landlocked salmon to take the bait.

My pursuit of landlocks eventually led me to outfit a 20-foot power boat with myriad electronics and downriggers, which, with spending enough time on the water, allowed me to become successful at catching these wily fish on a regular basis. However, along with the fun came all the tasks associated with the care and feeding of a fair-sized fishing boat. The tradeoffs seemed worth it – until gas prices skyrocketed. But I've got the bug and therefore need to spend time on the water in order to soothe the symptoms.

Downsizing, Kayak-Style

The relatively easy solution was to get a kayak. Heck, the kayak industry was way ahead of the game, because it was already producing kayaks with fishing packages. Not only was this a low-cost remedy, but it offered health benefits, as well. With the 14-foot kayak I purchased, I could now get out on the water and fish while paddling my way towards increased fitness. Additionally, it's a quieter, more peaceful way to experience life outdoors. I'm closer to the water in a kayak, so I'm more in tune with what's going on around me. I soon was catching numerous fish species; some, like the fallfish, I hadn't caught since I was kid. What could be better? Well, catching landlocked salmon, of course.

In my decked-out power boat, I had fine-tuned the speed I needed to troll, along with having my offerings at just the right depth, which were the keys for hooking up with these fish consistently. In my kayak, I no longer had the advantage of knowing the exact water depths, or the speed I was traveling, or how deep I was fishing – all crucial components to trolling successfully for landlocked salmon. But, as they say, where there's a will, there's a way.

I knew I didn't want to lose my newfound tranquil-

ity that comes with being in a kayak, but I couldn't mount an electronic depth sounder and downrigger on the one I had. So I did what many boat owners do when faced with this kind of dilemma: I saved up for another boat, a 12-foot hybrid kayak. This hybrid is completely open, like a canoe, and it has a hull design that gives it more stability in the water. I fashioned a wooden deck that accommodated the placement of one electric downrigger and an LCD sonar/fish finder. To be more precise in controlling my trolling speed when using the downrigger, I added an electric motor to the package. This means I'm not getting fit while fishing in the hybrid kayak, but if I want exercise, I go back to fishing while paddling my 14-foot kayak.

Thrills and Chills

Though I still have a ways to go to match the success I was having in hooking up with landlocked salmon in my gas guzzler, I'm beginning to get a few things figured out about this new mode of fishing. I've had a few salmon on, and it's a thrill. There's nothing like feeling as though you're sitting on the lake's surface and

There's nothing like feeling as though you're sitting on the lake's surface and having a salmon explode out of the water...

having a salmon explode out of the water, then dive towards bottom as it tests how well you've set your reel's drag system. Being so close to the water also allows the release of the catch to be less traumatic, because once it's been netted you don't have to lift the fish out of the water while the hook is being removed.

You do need to be absolutely safety conscious when you use a kayak to fish for salmon the way I do. Being keenly aware of wind direction and speed is paramount to ensuring that you don't find yourself in situations where the waves will break over the top of your kayak and swamp your craft. Although it's well known that a good salmon chop can sustain feeding frenzies, be extremely careful about where and when you fish if the wind is blowing, or is expected to blow, more than a few miles per hour. I have been on and around water for more than fifty years, so I have a healthy respect for how conditions can change almost instantly. So stay alert to what's going on around you weather-wise, and you will find that using your kayak to fish for landlocked salmon can be a phenomenal experience. **W**

Steve Perry is the Chief of the N.H. Fish and Game Fisheries Division and has an absolute passion for being connected to life outdoors.




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