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#### **PADDLING CAN OPEN NEW WORLD**

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Despite limitless ocean acreage open to recreation in New England, some of the great adventure by boat is the much quieter, almost mysterious world of the interior to be explored by paddle. The world of the canoe. Certainly the simplest, possibly the cheapest and unquestionably the purest from an environmental view, boating by canoe has been enjoying a huge resurgence over the last couple of seasons.

"In the last 12 years, there has never been a bigger year for us than this," says **Fred Westerberg**, owner of Saco Canoe and Kayak in Southern Maine. "Last year we began coming back strong, but this year is just great. People are staying closer to home and looking to get back to real outdoors."

In the Boston area, virtually all canoe sales and rental businesses report one of the best summers in recent years.

"It's easy; there's no prerequisite to canoeing on flat, warm water," says Mark Jacobsen of Charles River Canoe and Kayak in Newton.

Since kayaking is often seen as a skill beyond canoeing, Charles River has a four-part kayak instruction course on Thursday nights.

But the canoeing, says Jacobsen, is simple and more spontaneous: a bit of simple instruction at the center, and then a \$40 day trip can take canoeists anywhere from Hanover's North River up to streams in New Hampshire.

And even dealers are feeling the surge, both in canoe and kayak sales. One of the largest dealers in its region, Kittery Trading Post in southern Maine reports that business is booming. From a small \$450 boat to one of the large \$1,200 Mad River canoes, including kayaks of all kinds, the interest in every sort of paddle power is enjoying a great season, says Lisa Melone, an assistant manager of Kittery Trading Post.

"Some people are looking for wilderness adventure up in the Allagash, while some just want to noodle around on the pond near where they live," says Melone. "One guy called and said he wanted to buy a canoe he could live in."

And nearly all the practitioners, new and old, try to describe a certain elusive something about the canoe life that eludes other recreations:

"Canoeing is almost perfect," says James Golodanski, a writer and teacher from New York who spends several weeks in the waters of the Northeast every summer. "For very first starters, it's as cheap as you can get . . . basically as cheap as walking, once you buy the canoe."

"But it's also historic, and it takes you to the very most interior arteries of the country where it's so full of life and mystery and discovery that one becomes absolutely lost and absorbed in it all. No matter where you've gone in your canoe, you come back from very far away."

Even modest beginnings in the sport can be as transcendent as Golodanski finds the quiet path of the paddle. In Ipswich, for example, Foote Brothers Canoe near the Willowdale Dam on the Ipswich River offers a day trip through what feels like remote back-country wilderness.

The most popular trip begins with a 7-mile shuttle up the Ipswich River to Topsfield along Route 97 just upstream of the Wildlife Sanctuary. Nearly the entire trip courses through wilderness views, through the sanctuary and then Bradley Common State Park.

"The Ipswich River is swimmable," says Kate Noonan, a director at Foote Brothers, "and there are backwaters along the way to paddle into and have lunch. The ride is all flat water and it's easy to keep the boat going straight."

Like the North River that runs from Hanover to the Scituate coast, where Charles River Canoe conducts its trips, the Ipswich River is not large or deep enough beyond an upstream point for motorized boat use, so the canoeists have the stream to themselves.

After these one-day trips, the natural progression is to a two- or three- day camping trip along the Saco, a river that winds from the Conway region of New Hampshire to the shore of southern Maine.

The Saco is flat water that runs slowly over gravel bottom, with beaches along much of both banks -- excellent for camping. The longer, two-night, 36- mile trek begins in Fryeburg and winds down to Hiram, while a one-night trip runs 24 miles. At \$25.50 per canoe per day (all canoes are 16-foot Old Towns), says **Westerberg**, "That's pretty inexpensive recreation."

With your own new canoe -- or anything begged, borrowed or rented -- there is no end to such quiet flat waters in southern New England. Canoeists advanced enough for the more challenging rapid or white water already know where most of it is. So here are a couple of easily reached waters for a cartop canoe.

- On the south side of Mount Snow in southern Vermont is the 5-mile Somerset Reservoir. This 1,500-acre lake fed by the Deerfield River is so long and narrow that it feels like river canoeing. The lake will require an entire day to explore, and though no camping is allowed at the access point to the south, the surrounding landscape of the Green Mountain National Forest becomes wild and dense.

- Pisgah Reservoir in Winchester, N.H., is a deeply remote lake in the Pisgah State Park in the southwestern corner of the state. You have to carry the canoe in from the road here, a fact that limits the number of other canoes you're likely to see.

From these beginnings, it's the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, First and Second Connecticut Lakes at the top of the Granite State and Baxter State Park, the jewel of Maine. A canoe, simplest of boats, pulls them all into range.

Foote Brothers Canoes, Ipswich: (508) 356-9771.

Charles River Canoe and Kayak, Newton: (617) 965-5110.

**Saco River Canoe and Kayak**, Fryeburg: (207) 935-2369.

Caption:

PHOTO

Memo:

Woods and shore

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