

How to bug out on a waterway

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When the proverbial brown stuff hits the fan, escaping on a waterway might be your best option. Yet, many people ignore such alternatives, and they fail to acknowledge the advantages of owning a bug-out boat.

In our country's history, long before we had a network of asphalt roads and our ancestors built a transportation infrastructure, we had waters that served as highways. Rivers such as the Missouri, Mississippi, and Ohio, the Great Lakes, and the Erie canal were used to transport goods and people.

Such waterways will still prove useful in a survival scenario and provide you with a viable and rather safe route to reach a bug-out location. A kayak or canoe may prove to be your best mode of transportation to get out of harm's way.

Why choose a bug-out boat?

There are a few important reasons why people with access to waterways should consider bugging out by boat.

First of all, you've seen on the news how a mass exodus from urban areas will come to a full stop when accidents occur and the highways get clogged. Even in recent days, with Russia invading Ukraine, there were reports of people stuck in their cars as traffic came to a standstill for miles due to significant infrastructure destruction or panicked drivers causing all sorts of accidents. Roads can become clogged at any moment, and you will have to find alternatives means of transportation, not to mention that you will have to abandon most of your stuff.



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Second, in times of crisis, the roadways will become a hot spot for criminals or attackers, and they will prey on unsuspecting travelers. For example, you might stop in an unfamiliar environment, and the criminal element will see you as an easy target. In a “best-case scenario,” they will probably take your vehicle and supplies, but if things go really bad, they might decide to neutralize the “enemy” and will shoot at anything that moves.

And lastly, a boat will help you keep a safe distance from the social element and other unforeseen road-blockers. So you won’t have to worry about the waterway being clogged by other vehicles or being blocked by impassible debris, wildfires, and pretty much anything you will have to face on land.

In my opinion, being able to travel using a floatation raft or any type of watercraft will keep you safe and provide you access to areas that are impossible to reach by automobiles. You can find a location at your journey's end which is inaccessible to motorized vehicles and perhaps, even hard to reach on foot.

Also, traveling alongside freshwater routes will always provide you with access to potable water as long as you bring along some means to filter or purify it. You can even catch fish to extend your food supplies without spending too much energy searching for that perfect fishing spot.

Ok, but why should I choose a kayak or canoe?

As you can imagine, the main benefit of using such floatation devices is that you won’t run out of fuel.

At most, you will get tired from paddling, and you will need to fuel your body since that's the only engine a kayak or canoe uses. Even more, you will adjust your paddling to find your own pace and continue without growing tired from all the effort. In some cases, if you travel with a current, there will be almost no paddling needed from your side.

Kayaks and canoes are easy to transport, and even if you have to travel a bit to get to a waterway escape, you won't need a large vehicle to carry them or a tow hitch. You can easily place the canoe or kayak on top of your car and transport it effortlessly to a nearby water hole.

They are much smaller than boats and other watercraft, and they can travel in places with just a few inches of water. Even more, you won't have to worry about waterways clogged with weeds and aquatic plants since you aren't using a propeller that would get tangled up. You also don't need a boat launch to get the kayak or canoe into the water.

Portage is much easier around obstacles with kayaks or canoes, and you can carry them overland between waterways with ease or portage around rapids, dams, and waterfalls.

They can also become alternative or backup bug-out vehicles in case you are traveling by car. You could easily put a bicycle on the back of your car and a canoe on top. In case your car breaks down, you are covered for both land and water travel. You can easily adapt your bug-out plan to unforeseen scenarios with these two options.

The downside of such watercrafts is that they are much slower compared to motorboats, and you are limited to how many people you can transport or how much gear you can carry. Also, you need to have a decent amount of physical strength to get the craft on and off your car and paddle it.

Deciding between a kayak or canoe

Before you make up your mind on one of these crafts, it's best to figure out the advantages of each.

Kayak

Compared to canoes, a single-seat kayak is much lighter and easier to carry. You should not have any issues getting it on and off your vehicle by yourself.

A kayak has a slim, narrower profile and is paddled with a double paddle. I found it much easier to master paddling compared to the techniques of the canoe, such as draw strokes, backstrokes, and others.

In strong current or windy conditions, I consider the kayak to be much easier to be steered compared to a canoe. However, this depends on the experience you have and the time you've spent on the water.

Canoe

I find it much easier to get out of a canoe, and even if there are kayaks that you can sit on the top and are easier to get in and out of, I consider the canoe much more useful for carrying gear.

Compared to a kayak, you will have more space and a greater weight capacity with a canoe. This may become a critical advantage if you have greater distances to cover between your supply locations.

I recommend getting a canoe if you are not traveling alone, especially if you have children or pets. It's also much easier to transport an injured person using a canoe. If someone in your party gets injured and can't paddle, he/she can switch places with someone traveling with you in the canoe.

If you plan on hunting, for example, you will be able to carry a deer in your canoe much easier compared to a kayak. The open cargo of the canoe and larger weight capacity can help you carry big game.

Choosing the right craft for you

A short canoe or kayak is much easier to manipulate through tight areas, and you can turn it without going ashore. They can portage overland with ease, and you can pass obstacles easier. However, for a

longer boat is easier to keep it going in a straight line, and you will need fewer corrections with the paddle.

If you decide to go with a canoe, choose one that can carry the number of people required or the amount of gear you need. Stick with something that's not too big to handle or carry. For example, a two or three people canoe can have a weight capacity of 1,500 pounds, and it can accommodate 2/3 people and the gear they carry. However, it can also weigh more than 80 pounds, and it will be very difficult for one person to get it on or off the car. Also, the length of such a canoe, which often exceeds 15 feet long, can take a toll on maneuverability.

In terms of construction material, a lot of people will go with Polyethylene canoes since these are light and rugged and also maintenance-free. However, from experience, I can tell you that these canoes can warp or soften over time, and the trick to avoid this is to store them in places where they aren't exposed to direct sunlight.

Others go with aluminum ones, but these can get really hot when you leave them on the sunny shorelines. They are very durable, but they also make quite some noise when you clang the paddle against them.

Those with money to spare will probably go with canoes made from fiberglass and Kevlar since these are lighter and often faster compared to the others. However, these canoes are designed for speed and can sometimes prove to be less stable due to their round bottoms. If you don't have a lot of canoeing experience, I recommend picking a flat-bottom canoe since it's more stable.

If you decide to go with a kayak, I advise you to get one that has enough room in the front and back to stow some gear. Many kayak models have hatches to access the storage areas, and this makes it easier to get your pack or sleeping bag. However, keep in mind that storage space is limited compared to canoes, and large items will probably need to be stored behind your seat or packed by your feet.

Also, if you get a kayak, I recommend installing footpegs since these allow you to sit comfortably in your craft. This is important if you have to travel long distances, and besides providing a comfortable position, it also helps you paddle efficiently by maintaining a correct paddling position and posture.

Recommended gear

Regardless if you choose a kayak or a canoe, there will be some gear you need. Here are the essential items I recommend getting.

Life jackets

It doesn't matter how good of a swimmer you think you are; life jackets are essential. You should make sure everyone traveling using waterways wears one. If you bring your dog along, make sure you get one for it as well. You may think you don't need one, but it won't matter how well you can swim if you bump your head or if a strong current carries you away if you fall in the water.

Seatback rests

In general, kayak seats have backrests to provide a comfortable sitting position. Some canoe seats also have them, but that's not always "standard" equipment. However, you can buy seats with backrests for pretty much any type of canoe, and you will be glad you did so if you are traveling great distances.

Boat cushion

A while ago, a fellow canoeing enthusiast suggested I should get a boat cushion since it will prove useful in windy conditions or when dealing with a strong current. In such conditions, I always get off my seat and kneel at the bottom of the canoe to obtain a lower center of gravity. Such a cushion has made life much easier for me, and I'm a lot more comfortable when kneeling while paddling.

Carriers

You will need to get a carrier to attach to your car roof in order to transport your kayak or canoe safely. There are carriers on the market that requires no tools to be attached to the vehicle's roof. You can make all sorts of improvisation for carrying the canoe or kayak using foam blocks and a set of ratchet straps, but it's better to go with something safer. Also, consider getting a cart for your kayak or canoe if you're handling a heavier craft. These will come in handy when you need to push or pull your boat, and there are models that can be easily assembled (frame and wheels come apart) and

stored in your trunk.

Duffle and bags

Here the choice is up to you, and there are all sorts of dry and waterproof bags and duffels available on the market. I also have to admit that oftentimes, I've stored some items in trash bags to keep them dry, but I find waterproof bags and duffels to be a much better option since they have straps that can be lashed to the thwarts of the canoe with ease. In case I capsize, I won't worry about losing my stuff.

Navigating items

Some folks like to stay close to the shore to navigate with ease or be safer in case they have a mishap. However, if you must cross open water, you will need to have a few navigating items. A map, a GPS, and even a compass are just as good for water traveling as they are for land navigation.

Concluding

If you have access to waterways or if you can reach such fluid highways in a decent amount of time, I recommend considering a canoe or kayak as a plan B for your bugging-out plan. Such crafts can become your primary means of escape if your car breaks down or if the road gets blocked by a natural disaster or the ill-intentioned elements of society.

Always have a contingency plan in case you are forced to deal with unexpected circumstances, and figure out if a bug-out boat is a good alternative if you are forced to evacuate.

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