

14



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Home [Why Wood & Canvas](#) Canoes Traditional Gear Events Journal About Us Contact & Ordering

Why wood and canvas?

History

As a descendant of the birch bark canoe, wood and canvas canoes have their roots firmly in that tradition. Although the earliest documented account of these canoes is not until 1535, it is clear that birch bark canoes had been used in North America for much longer, probably thousands of years.

Birch bark canoes are a wondrous craft. To take materials readily available in the surrounding forest, and with hand tools create a lightweight, flexible, robust and forgiving craft that can be paddled and carried by one person over thousands of miles, is *still* one of humanity's greatest technological achievements.

When the sheer volume of European settlers in North America (fueled by the promise of land and the riches of the fur-trade) outstripped the ability of the local canoe builders to collect enough bark and make enough canoes, the wood and canvas canoe was born. This technique incorporated an ingenious way to use readily available canvas as a skin instead of birch bark, and was coupled with an impressive method of construction (the permanent canoe form) which could deal with the demands of increased production.

The lines of the first wood and canvas canoes heavily borrowed from the superbly functional designs of the local Indians and the construction methods were simply an extension of earlier skills. What evolved, then, was a wonderful marriage of tried and tested designs and methods, coupled with the advantages and fresh eyes that modernity brought to the problem.



The Rewards

The case for the Wood and Canvas Canoe tradition grows stronger, even still, when we examine it in the context of education.

Bill Mason once said... *'All my life people have been telling me that I should never travel alone, but... I have never been told that by anyone who has ever done it!'*

Mason was a defender of self-reliance and experience and a wood and canvas canoe is a bastion in this view. Because these canoes require a little more care than plastic boats, we believe that they hone your skills and encourage good practice in a way that other canoe types may never do.



'Nothing feels like a Cedar Strip Canvas Canoe'
Omer Stringer

Functionality

The word 'traditional' often carries the unnecessary connotation of the regressive, as if things from the past can never match things of the present or future in functional prowess. We believe that this is simply not the case.

In the canoe journeying tradition, wood and canvas canoes are every bit as practical as the most modern boats. The advantages of wood are numerous; light, flexible, water-resistant, rot-resistant, strong and warm to the touch, not to mention beautiful. Canvas is also flexible, strong, durable and lightweight. Our canoes are trimmed with local hardwoods, where we are simply spoiled with the UK's excellent selection and diversity. And because all these materials are selected with care, we stand by their fitness for purpose.

Although we would confidently back wood and canvas canoes in any realistic match with modern materials, they are certainly a holistic, living craft. They are not a soul-less, static entity which can be neglected. They do require care and attention from time to time, as any vehicle does, but these requirements are generally limited to a lick of varnish every once in a while. And contrary to ignorant views of 'traditional' craft, they are in many ways *more* practical, by the ease and accuracy in which they can be repaired. It is testament to the durability of these craft that there are many boats still in circulation which are well over a hundred years old. How many people can confidently say that about their modern, Royalex boat?

Wood and canvas canoes grow with their owners. They can offer you the opportunity to attach valuable skills to the canoeists armoury by learning simple techniques for restoration and maintenance. And should you need to make a field repair on your boat, you *can* simply learn how. In fact, providing information on this will be part of our service to you as you leave with your shiny new boat. Of course you can always return your boat to us for repair and restoration should you need to.



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