



Whitewater Kayaking Kit for Beginners

It's really easy to spend a large amount of money on kit at the start of your kayaking journey, and find out 6 months later that it's not really suitable or what you want. The first few times you try whitewater paddling, you should definitely try to borrow kit – from the Club, from the coach, or from other paddlers. If you start in the summer, you can often “make do” with gear which isn't kayak-specific – a waterproof coat instead of a cag, crocs instead of wetsuit boots, etc. As the weather gets colder then it becomes more important to have the correct kit.

Once you've decided to take the plunge, this little guide may just help you out with those all-important kit buying decisions!

Base Layers – When out on moving water, you are much more susceptible to becoming cold quickly, due to the inevitability that you will get wet, whether through water splashes or falling in. So making sure you have good base layers which will keep you warm.

If you're out for a day, a good guide is if you are too hot at the start of the day, you will probably be about right by the end.

You shouldn't be wearing anything cotton, as it is really cold when wet and holds moisture.

Rash vests are great for the summer, but on their own are chilly in the winter.

Fleece is excellent as stays warm when wet, you can pick up fleeces relatively cheaply from places such as go outdoors and mountain warehouse.

Ski thermals also work very well.

Trousers

You have two choices here, either go for semi-dry (or dry) trousers and wear fleece trousers or leggings underneath or get neoprene trousers. Semi-dry (dry trousers) work by giving a waterproof and windproof layer to your legs, with warm base layers underneath you should stay reasonably warm.

Neoprene trousers work like a wetsuit, when they get wet a thin layer of water is trapped between your skin and the neoprene, this heats up and helps to keep you warm. The problem with neoprene is it's not windproof, and if they are not wet they are less effective. That said they protect your legs well and a lot of whitewater paddlers use them in the summer, when not using drysuits.



Cag

A waterproof/ top or Cagoule – Most paddlers just call them cags. There are loads of different types of cags, from simple no-nonsense with a single waist, neoprene cuffs and an easy open neck, to an all singing all dancing dry cag with double waist, latex neck and wrist seals with extra protection over these and Kevlar elbow patches.

For whitewater you really want either a Semi-dry or Dry Cag, there protect from the majority of splashing and water egress, until you (and then you will get wet). You also want to find a cag with a double seal, so you can put your spraydeck in between.



will
swim
waist

Semi-dry cags have latex wrists, but a neoprene neck. Dry cags have latex for both wrist and neck seals .



Drysuit

Drysuits combine both the dry trousers and cag into a complete suit, they are drier and warmer than separates, but are expensive and can still leak a bit.

Shoes

Most people either have wetsuit boots, or water shoes. Wetsuit boots keep your feet warmer, but aren't so good on slippery rocks. But as a beginner wetsuit boots are very suitable, just make sure you get some with a reasonably tough sole, so it doesn't feel like walking on Lego every step you take.



Helmet

An essential part of your safety kit, again come in all shapes and sizes, but you don't have to spend much initially to get a helmet that is suitable. But if you want a peak, full face or more coverage you are looking at spending more. Make sure it is made for kayaking rather than climbing or cycling as kayaking helmets have a hard outer shell as get quite a few little bumps and are designed to protect from these.

Buoyancy Aid (PFD)

Another essential bit of kit, you can either choose a zip one or pull on, this is personal preference on what feels the most comfortable.

Make sure it fits well when you are sitting down in a kayak, and gives enough freedom of movement to twist your body. Make sure it doesn't ride up, so a slightly shorter design will suit.

Again personal preference is amount of pockets you want, but you want a pocket for choccie bars, knife, whistle, phone, gloves, etc.

While still learning how to whitewater kayak, the suggestion is to stay away from any pfd with a chest harness. These are for serious rescues, and something you need specialist training for. If you buy a pfd with a chest harness, remove it until you know how to use it.



Other bits and pieces

Whistle – Useful to attract attention over the sound of the water, or if you are in trouble.

Mobile phone case – waterproof case for your phone and car keys. Make sure it is waterproof.

Gloves/ Poggies – Chilly hands mean they don't work well and you get cold more quickly. Gloves can be slippy on the paddle, poggies attach to the paddle and are a good option, but some people don't like them.

Drybag – For lunch, and other bits and pieces you want to keep dry.

Skull cap – neoprene hat which fits under your helmet, keeps your noggin warm.

Boat

A fairly essential bit of your paddling kit, but expensive. Work out what arm of paddling you want to get into before spending loads on a boat. Try as many different models and types as you can before settling on one.

If you can get one second hand, do.....just like a car..... if you buy one brand new you lose about £150 just by taking it out of the shop. Yes you will have warranty, but you can pick up good second hand boats for £300-£400, and if you decide to sell it on, you can get rid of it for about the same price.

Paddle

Just like the boat, you need to work out what type of paddling you want to get into, as for touring you would want a longer paddle than for whitewater.

Definitely spend as much as you can to get a reasonably decent paddle, as they are lighter and stronger, and will be much easier to paddle with.

We all used to paddle with 90 degree feathered paddles, but 45 degree or even 30 degree are much kinder on the wrists and the most suitable for whitewater use.

Spraydeck

There are 2 sizes of spraydeck– keyhole and big deck for whitewater kayaking. Different boats and makes of boat use a variety of these. So until you get yourself a boat, it can be a waste of money to get a spraydeck.

For whitewater kayaking a neoprene deck is much more suitable than a nylon sieve. A knee strap can be useful as it gives another way of getting the spraydeck off.

Where to get all this?

Canoe shops offer good advice and allow you to try the kit for size, most also offer demos of boats too. Locally Kent Canoes offers a good service, and MCC club members get a discount.

Get as much as you can second hand (apart from your helmet and buoyancy aid), this can save you some money. Try:

EBay

Facebook Group – Used Kayaks UK

Facebook Group – used kayaks/accessories uk

UK rivers guidebook – www.ukriversguidebook.co.uk

What brands produce quality kit?

Palm – Produces good quality kit including ladies sizes, excellent PFD's and their warranty is the best in the business.

Peak – Solid clothing and PFD's

Nookie – Good quality British made, but odd sizing so try before you buy

Lomo – cheaper, but still good quality

Shred Ready & WRSI – For helmets if you're looking at spending under £100

Others: YAK, Sandiline, NRS, Astral, Sweet (Excellent quality – just very expensive),

Typhoon