

what's on board?

Article: Chris Brain

Many paddlers choose to carry a range of equipment when they are out on the water. Depending on where I am, what I am doing and who I am with will ultimately influence the kit and equipment that I choose to carry. Something I think that is really important is that we don't just carry the same kit everywhere regardless of what we are doing without giving it any thought. We should aim to assess the needs of the situation and adapt our equipment accordingly. I have come up with a range of kit that I carry through a constant process of paddling and evaluation. I have removed some items that I hardly ever used, in favour of some pieces of equipment that I use regularly. However, some items that we use infrequently, might still be seen as essential (such as our knife).

This kit covered in this article is what I usually have when I am on whitewater in my kayak and typically in charge of a team or taking a leadership role. Of course, some teams will choose to split some of this kit up between them and if you are paddling in a different environment such as the sea, open water or doing overnight trips, you will have different needs. This is just intended to be a starting point for the whitewater paddler, ultimately it's up to you to choose what you think is useful to carry.

MY PFD AND CAG

1 Keys in waterproof pouch (in cag pocket)

I keep the keys to my van in a water proof pouch and keep it inside the pocket in my cag. If I have my keys with me (as opposed to in my boat) I don't risk losing them should I swim or be separated from my boat for whatever reason. I have been involved in several situations where the need to be able to drive my vehicle has been essential. Therefore, I always have my own keys on me so that I know exactly where they are.

2 Phone in waterproof case (in cag pocket)

My phone is a super useful tool. It has phone numbers of people I might need to contact in an emergency as well as the contact details of the team that I am paddling with should we end up separated or out of sight. It also has maps, GPS and even has a first aid app on there too. I keep it in a waterproof case and store it in my cag pocket with my keys so it is out of the way of the kit I might need to get to in a hurry such as my slings and krabs but is still close to hand.

3 Waterproof notebook

As I work full time coaching paddlesport, a notebook is pretty handy for gathering information and giving feedback. A notebook can also be handy in an emergency situation where I might need to record a casualty's vital signs or to write down our location or critical information

4 Waterproof pencil

This one is pretty simple really; the waterproof pencil writes on the waterproof notebook! (The pencil is actually a bit fancy and is designed not to fall to pieces when it gets repeatedly wet.)

5 Large locking karabiner

I tend to keep a spare large (HMS/pear-shaped) locking karabiner handy as this can be easily clipped onto a throwbag and then potentially onto something else like a boat if needed. It is also handy should I need to create some kind of mechanical advantage system to unpin a boat. Finally, a locking karabiner should always be used if clipping into a chest harness for example in a live bait rescue.

6 Snaggate karabiner

This is something I've started carrying recently as it allows me to clip a karabiner very quickly and easily over a paddle shaft. In an advanced rescue situation, I might clip this snaggate to my throwbag and then to my paddle to use my paddle as a javelin if I am trying to get the rope through a curtain of water or to potentially make it easier to grab for a swimmer in a stopper.

7 Earplugs

As paddlers, we are highly susceptible to developing surfer's ear. This is a condition where the ear canal is narrowed by bone which grows slowly in the ear canal over a long period of time due to exposure to cold jets of water being forced into our ear. The risk of this can be reduced by wearing earplugs. All kinds of ear plugs are available (including custom prescription ones) so find ones that fit and stick them in your ears. I wear them all the time when I am in whitewater and never have a problem hearing other people even when I am coaching.

8 Mini kayak

I use my mini kayak all the time, it's really useful when I combine it with my notepad. I draw a rapid on my notepad and use the kayak to explain angles of attack when crossing eddylines, how to surf waves, escaping from stoppers and so on. It is also a really good way to explain rotations when coaching freestyle moves too.

9 Sun cream

Being sunburnt is no joke. It can really ruin your day, have a big effect on your paddling trip and of course the long-term effects of exposure to the sun can be extremely bad for our health. Most paddlers put sun cream on in the morning but then don't take sun cream with them so that they can top it up as they need to. I carry a mini tube of sun cream (or sometimes a sunstick) and use it as I go. Once you have put the sun cream on, grab a handful of sand or dirt from the side of the river and roll it around the palm of your hands so that your hands don't slide when you grab your paddle again.

10 Knife

If I ever have to cut a rope in an emergency I want a decent knife close to hand. We should be able to open it with one hand, the blade should lock in place and it should be in good condition and sharp enough for the task. On the thumb hole you could add in an extra bit of tape to make a bite tab so you can open it with your teeth (should you not be able to open it with one hand) and you can also add a bit of cord to make it easier to pull out from your PFD quickly.

11 Saw

Sometimes a bit of pruning can be required on the river, we might have some small tree branches in the way, or we could need remove a dangerous strainer from the river. I also carry this so that should I (or anyone else) get trapped with their feet under a kneeling thwart in a canoe then it would be possible to cut the wood and to free them. It would also make short work of any plastic kayak should it ever be required to cut someone free.



12 Sling (pre-coiled with twistlock karabiner attached)

I like storing my kit neatly and ready to go. If we coil our tape/sling then it will make it much easier to deploy should we need to. It will be tangle free and will also store much easier in a PFD this way too. I have a simple twistlock karabiner on the end of my tape that is easy to snap onto a grab loop or handle but still has the security of the locking mechanism meaning it won't come undone.

13 Energy bar

When I'm hungry I don't paddle well. I keep an energy bar in my PFD most of the time so that I can snack as I go. I find that a lot of paddlers can dip after they have had a big exertion of energy or adrenaline (such as running a waterfall, big rapid or taking a swim) so I often encourage paddlers to have a bite to eat after situations like this, especially if we have a long day ahead of us.

14 Whistle (not pictured, but tucked in shoulderstrap pouch)

Tucked away in the pocket for my shoulder strap is my whistle. It is easily accessible, and it is very loud and clear should I need to attract attention in a situation. I rarely use it in my regular paddling situations, so when I blow it you know I mean it!

KEEP IT CLEAN!

One thing that I am very mindful of when I get dressed for paddling whitewater is that I aim to adopt a clean profile as much as is realistically possible. I have nothing added to the PFD that can catch (such as externally stored knife, watch, etc.). This means that I reduce the risk of anything snagging either in the event of a swim or when trying to get back into a boat.





Fully packed kit bags ready for the day.

IN THE BOAT

Some kit is really practical to have on your person, but of course some items will need to go in the boat. The kit we carry in our boat and with us on the river can make a big difference and could turn a situation from being something major into a minor inconvenience.

I usually carry all of my kit in two main bags, apart from my throwbag and water which I have accessible when sitting in my kayak. Each bag is attached to the inside of the boat with another large screwgate karabiner, the same as the ones that I carry in my PFD.

Throwbag

I like my throwbag close to hand when I'm on the river so I store it neatly under a strap just in front of my seat. Some people prefer to carry it behind the seat, but I find this just makes it inaccessible in an emergency.

Water bottle

Dehydration can make us feel awful and can lead to a decline in our performance on the water. Over the years I've seen a lot of people go the full day paddling without drinking any water and it just isn't good for us. Keep a water bottle close to hand somewhere accessible in your boat, you don't want to have to get out to have a drink.

In my standard dry bag

Split paddles

Super useful bits of kit that I tend to have with me most of the time for when you or someone in the group end up breaking or dropping their paddle. Of course, if I am at a whitewater course, doing park and play, roadside paddling (or others in the group are carrying them) then they may not be necessary.

My lunch

Do I really need to explain this one?? Unless I'm on a short trip and only out for a couple of hours, I'll always stick something to eat in my boat... You wouldn't like me when I'm hangry...

Space for extras

In this drybag there is usually space for a bit more kit if required such as a jacket to throw over myself whilst waiting for the shuttle and maybe a flask if it's the middle of winter and I'm out all day.



A decent set of splits can be a game changer.

In my Watershed bag

Many coaches and paddlers use Watershed dry bags to store their kit. Even though they cost more than a standard bag they are simply exceptional bits of equipment and are completely dry. I also have a set of lightweight bags that keep everything organised in this bag too.

1 First aid kit

What you carry in your first aid kit depends on your group, the location and how long you are going to be out. For most days out on the water, I'm carrying a pretty compact kit containing just the essentials (see below for more info on the contents)

2 Group shelter

Getting cold is horrible! A group shelter can be a simple way to fight the cold at the side of the river. Think of it as a flysheet for a tent which is pulled over several people to create a shelter supported by the people inside. This keeps the wind and rain off and gets warm very quickly. Many modern shelters are lightweight and can of course be used repeatedly, they are great for when you are waiting for the shuttle in the middle of winter and lunch stops by the riverside too!

3 Blizzard survival jacket

A company called Blizzard make a fantastic material called Reflexcell, which is significantly warmer than a standard foil blanket due to its complex construction. Blizzard use this material to create a "one size fits all" type jacket and then vacuum it down to the size of a few slices of bread so that it's easy to carry and store in the back of our boat. The good thing with the Blizzard jacket is our cold paddler can still move and work on generating their own heat. You could certainly paddle wearing this jacket although I wouldn't want to paddle anything hard in it (it would be great to watch this though!)

4 Foil bivvy bag and survival sheet

I also carry a super lightweight foil bivvy bag and foil survival sheet which can be used to help get a cold paddler warm or to help a casualty maintain their temperature.

5 Repair kit

My repair kit is pretty compact, but contains lots of useful little items such as cord, zip ties, duct tape, repair putty, a turbo flame, flashband repair tape, foam bung, multi tool, Stormsure repair patches and a micro torch. Being able to patch up a boat or do some temporary boat fixes can really change the outcome of the trip especially on rivers where we are further away from the road.



6 Energy gels and spare food

Having spare food is always a good idea. I carry a couple of energy bars and energy gels on most days out on the river, which should be enough to give most paddlers a boost.

7 Buff and waterproof mittens

A buff is great because it can be used in so many ways to warm head, neck and hands and the mittens are easy to put on to warm up the hands. Putting on gloves when your hands are wet and cold is never easy!

8 Torch

I've been caught out in the dark on the river... it wasn't that pleasant... I saw the light and now carry a torch.

Map and navigation tools (not pictured)

If we have an issue on the river, we will need to know where we are so that we can either get ourselves out of there or get help to us. All of the traditional options still work such as map, compass, copied pages of guidebooks etc., but technological advances mean that phones with mapping software and GPS can be invaluable too. I try not to rely on technology as my only means of navigation but it certainly can come in handy when you need it. There are various grid reference apps that can also be useful when we need to find out location too.

First Aid Kit

When we are out on the river we don't usually fix people, all we do is provide a temporary solution until someone else with better kit/knowledge/skills takes over. Most of the situations that require us to get our first aid kit out are minor (cuts, grazes and bumps) and we need some simple solutions for that. The issue that we have as paddlers is that traditional first aid items such as plasters and dressings don't tend to work very well in the wet on their own. A product that has been a real game changer for me when giving first aid on the riverside has been Vetrup. These self-cohesive bandages are not affected by the water in the same way as a traditional bandage, they are also elasticated and easy to use so are perfect for around the water. It can be used for anything from broken fingers, to grazed knuckles and twisted ankles, and to keep dressings and plasters in place too. As it is only a bandage and not a dressing you will still need something underneath it if you are trying to stop bleeding, but Vetrup will certainly help keep that dressing in place when you are on or next to the river.

I try and keep my first aid kit quite simple. **Emergency instructions and a casualty card** – including a pencil to write on it with **Gloves** – let's keep things as clean as possible

Antiseptic wipes – keeping minor cuts clean **Plasters and steri strips** – for dealing with small injuries

Military dressing – these give better compression and are easier to use

Melolin pads – which can be cut down if needed to use with the Vetrup

Vetrup – multiple uses, I don't leave home without it

Shears – if you are going to cut a bag or drysuit it is much easier than using your river knife

Face shield – for CPR

Tape – always handy to have a little bit in a first aid kit

Triangular bandage – cut to an XL size from plastic sheeting so it can go over PFD's and bigger people

My spare inhaler – just in case it's needed

Aspirin – 300mg tablets for heart attack **Rehydration sachets** – for dehydrated paddlers

Ibuprofen and Paracetamol – simple pain relief

Tick remover – Avoid Lyme disease by getting rid these little critters properly

IS THIS NOT A LOT OF KIT TO CARRY IN A KAYAK???

Yes... probably... I'm not saying you need to carry this all the time and in fact with a bit of thought and preparation you can in fact pack all this kit in a surprisingly lightweight package and can even decide to leave some things in the car too if you don't want them. Think about where you're going and what you're doing, share the kit with the group, do some decent planning and you'll be away! Our kit should be matched to our experience, our role and our skills and of course we should be doing our best to avoid getting any of this kit out in the first place!

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