

# New to Paddling? BY CHRIS BRAIN

## Some Useful Advice to Help You Get Started

We're seeing a huge increase in people taking advantage of the good weather and opportunities to get outside as lockdown eases. It is great to see so many new faces joining us on the water and giving paddling a go. If you are someone taking to the water for the first time or someone who has returned after some time out, we hope you're enjoying exploring the waterways as much as we do! With this in mind, we asked fellow paddler and paddle coach expert, **Chris Brain** for his advice to help you get to grips with, and progress your paddling whilst enjoying being out on the water.

### What is Happening on Your Doorstep?

Exploring and adventuring from the water is fantastic, but knowing where to go can be difficult. The paddle trails section of the Go Paddling website has so many great ideas for planning your paddles and it's a great resource to broaden your routes.

### Take some binoculars

Try not to get too focused on the distance you cover or how fast you're going, instead, take your time. You get a different perspective from the water and if you have some binoculars and a bird book, you'll be surprised what you see along the way. Spot wildlife, learn about the history of our waterways and even develop skills such as map reading and navigation too.

### Do your homework

You will have a much better adventure on the water if you do a little bit of homework before heading out. Consider where you'll get in (access) and get out (egress), how far your journey is and also how long it might take. If you are unsure about the answers to these questions, the Paddlepoints section of the Go Paddling website has all this information ready for you. Above all, you must ensure that the journey you want to take matches your skills and experience. Be sure to check the weather forecast, so that you know what to wear and which way the wind will be blowing, plus think about what you might take with you such as a spare layer, something to eat and drink and have your phone available should you need assistance.

### Go to a specialist paddlesport shop

It is well worth visiting or contacting a specialist paddlesport shop for some advice and help with equipment. Even if you're not planning on buying your own kit just yet, time spent speaking with the shop will be worth it in the long run. Not only will you be able to see the broad range of equipment available, you will also be able to gain advice, ask questions and speak to people who will be glad to help as much as you need. Specialist paddlesport shops are always run by people who love to get out on the water, they often have equipment to hire or try out and will be able to advise you where to go paddling. Getting the right kit from the start can actually save you money in the long run, instead of buying the wrong thing and having to make multiple purchases later on.

### Join a club

A great way to gather some of the help that you need and potentially to gain access to equipment to use could be to join a paddlesport club. You will meet a huge range of people, from paddlers starting out just like yourself to veterans who have paddled the world and back! Clubs can also be a great opportunity to access coaching too as there will always be someone willing to help develop your skills on the water. Head over to the 'find paddling clubs' section of the Go Paddling website to locate your local group.



## Get some help

Following the guidance of a professional coach can develop your skills more quickly. By engaging with a coach in this formal way you can make sure that you begin on the right path and understand how to develop the foundation skills of paddlesport. A coach will also be able to signpost you towards other opportunities and steer you in the right direction to be more self-sufficient.

## Go paddling regularly

It goes without saying that the best way to get better at paddling is to go paddling! Committing to going out regularly will really help develop the skills you need and start to build your experience quickly. Even if you only get on the water for half an hour, there's lots that can be done in a short space of time.

## Immerse yourself

It is inevitable that at some point you will end up capsizing your boat or falling off your board! It is really important to learn some rescue skills early on so when that happens for real, you'll feel calm and confident about the situation. Remember everyone falls in at some point, it's totally normal and it's possible you might even enjoy it!

## Try it All Out!

There are so many options when it comes to paddling; different types of water and all sorts of different craft to match. Whilst you might be focused on one type of paddling initially, once you get going your motivations and aspirations may change. Don't limit yourself by only trying one discipline - try and have a go at as many different types of paddling as you can. A canoe club, activity centre or a specialist paddlesport provider will help you explore different disciplines - you might surprise yourself!

## Great Adventures are More Important Than Great Paddle Strokes

Finally, this is probably the most important bit of advice that I can give. Going paddling and enjoying it, is much more important than actually being technically good at it! You can spend so much time focusing on your paddling skills and worrying whether you're doing it right, that you forget to actually go on adventures on the water. Remember if you have limited experience choose a very sheltered environment such as a canal, small pond or flat section of river and see if someone more experienced can go along with you. Learning as you go is the best way.

## Happy Paddling!

Chris has been kayaking, canoeing, SUPing and coaching for over 20 years and runs his own business Chris Brain Coaching, delivering paddlesport coaching, safety and rescue courses and REC First Aid training.

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