

## Go Canoeing or Kayaking With Your Dog

**A kayak or canoe gives new meaning to "doggie paddle."**

*James W. Keldsen*

The world's waters have seduced humans for thousands of years. Although the great days of exploring uncharted waters on the Seven Seas may be long gone, the water still provides limitless recreation for us and our four-legged companions.

For more than 15 years, Wyatt Boughter has been a recreational paddler and canoe racer. One of his frequent paddling companions is his black Labrador Retriever Stanza.

"Taking Stanza with me when I paddle gives us both a chance to get outside and relax," says Boughter, who is also the director of communications and marketing with the American Canoe Association. That relaxation is something that we all can use in our hurried lives, so why not try paddling with your dog?

According to the ACA, paddle sports are some of the fastest growing outdoor activities. Since 1998 canoeing has increased by 16.3 percent, while kayaking has rocketed 130 percent.

Today's newcomer to the paddle-sporting world has more choices in boats than ever before — from beginner to advanced models. Now is a great time to try paddling and see how enjoyable it can be for dog and person alike.

You don't have to live in a wilderness area or have access to a large body of water to enjoy the sport. Boughter lives and works in the Washington, D.C., area, and he and Stanza get great workouts in their canoe on Virginia's Occoquan River and Reservoir. "Having her with me allows me to get in my workout, and gives her a chance to stay lean as well," he says.

Dogs have a way of making the activities we share with them more fun. While Boughter and his dog both enjoy time in the boat, Stanza often swims alongside the canoe or runs on the shore as Boughter paddles. "I'd say she only stays in the boat with me about half the time I'm on the water," Boughter explains. Her antics in and out of the water make Boughter laugh and give him a smile at the end of the day.

Before you start paddling with your dog, first assess whether your dog is ready. Does she love the water? If so, train her to jump in and out of the canoe on land, then progress to shallow water before moving on to longer trips. Outfit her in a canine lifejacket — just in case she tires or gets hurt.

If you are new to canoeing, you'll need a bit of training, too. Boughter recommends that you contact your local paddle outfitter or retail outlet and try to meet others who canoe with their dogs. He also suggests taking a paddling course through the ACA.

When talking with retailers and instructors, tell them that ultimately, after you gain experience, you wish to paddle with your dog. They will recommend stable canoes or kayaks, well-suited to you and your dog.

Whether it's canoeing, kayaking, or rafting, paddle sports offer limitless opportunities to explore our horizons, bask in the water's hypnotizing effect and serenity, and get outside with our dogs. Boughter puts it best: "Paddling is great for building community, and so is owning a dog. It's a perfect match."

James W. Keldsen is a member of the Outdoor Writers Association of America and enjoys many outdoor pursuits with his dogs.

For more information, visit [www.americancanoe.org](http://www.americancanoe.org).