



The sensational seven

Suzanne Morphet presents her pick of Canada's best kayaking territory

THE traditional birch-bark canoe was the best way for the Native Americans of southern Canada, and later the fur traders, to paddle the nation's rivers and lakes. But it seems kayaking instruction is eclipsing canoe courses. Although canoe purchases in North America are down 20 per cent, kayak sales have risen 144 per cent in the past nine years. And when US car companies want to convey freedom and independence they make sure kayaks are strapped to the roof-racks of the cars in their ads.

Or as Vancouver Island kayak instructor Doug Alderson describes the surging interest to me: "Big time, huge." Of course, some of the sport's sex appeal comes care of Adam van Koevorden. Canada's Olympic flag-bearer broke his world record with a 1min 35.554sec paddle across 500m at the Beijing Olympics.

But even if we recreational paddlers can't go that fast, we can still steer a kayak on lakes and oceans across Canada, even when the water is very nippy.

Desolation Sound, British Columbia: When Captain George Vancouver named this sheltered waterway in 1792, he couldn't find much to recommend it. "An awful silence pervaded the gloomy forests," he recorded. "The steep rocky shores prevented the use of the seine, and not a fish at the bottom could be tempted to take the hook." There may not be great fishing, but Alderson, author of *Sea Kayak Around Vancouver Island*, finds the area "spectacularly beautiful... the green forest comes right down to the water". And with an average summer temperature of 22C, the water itself is reason to visit. Paddle, swim and even stargaze, as there are pretty purple and pink starfish clinging to the rocky shorelines. www.bcseakayak.com.

Broken Group Islands, British Columbia: Part of Pacific Rim National Park, Broken Group is kayak heaven. Dozens of islands offer protection from the open ocean. Evidence of early Native American habitation, such as culturally modified trees, stone fishtraps and middens are abundant and so is sea life, "from small clams and periwinkles up to grey and humpback whales and occasional killer whales", Alderson notes. www.batstar.com.

Lake Athabaska, Alberta and Saskatchewan: Sea kayaks are not just for the ocean. They're equally suited to big lakes, and Lake Athabaska is the fourth largest lake entirely in Canada. Along the south shore are spectacular sand dunes, as high as 30m and stretching for 100km. "They're moving with the wind, something like a metre a year and engulfing the forest," says Laurel

Archer, paddling guide, instructor and author of two guidebooks. Organise your own floatplane and kayaks to and from the lake. www.athabascalake.com.

Pukaskwa National Park, Ontario: The only wilderness national park in the province, Pukaskwa offers kilometres of paddling pleasure along the ancient shoreline of Lake Superior. "It's the remoteness of the location that makes it fantastic," says David Johnston, a sea kayak instructor in Toronto. "You won't find anybody out there." Crystal-clear water and white sandy beaches add to the appeal. But be ready for swells of roller-coaster proportions and winds that can keep you ashore one day in three. www.blackfeather.com.

Thousand Islands, Ontario: There are about 2000 islands in the St Lawrence River between Brockville and Kingston, but you'll be too distracted by the scenery, above and below the water, to keep track. The water is so clear in places that shipwrecks loom clearly. Anne Baxter, publisher of paddling magazine *Kanawa*, grew up beside the St Lawrence and still enjoys the islands' "majestic pines set in the rugged beauty of the Canadian Shield". www.1000islandskayakingco.com.

Saguenay Fjord, Quebec: Carved by glaciers and stretching more than 100km into the Canadian Shield, this fjord of the St Lawrence River is one of the world's longest. Where it meets the fresh water of the Saguenay River, the water is biologically rich and turbulent. "Its dark, quick-changing water offers majestic scenery, high cliffs, charming campsites and herds of curious Beluga whales," says Serge Savard, a local kayak instructor and guide. www.caribou-expeditions.com.

Kane Basin, Nunavut: Since the Inuit invented the kayak, what better place to test it than the high Arctic? This finger of ocean between Ellesmere Island and Greenland harbours icebergs, hanging glaciers, soaring peaks and lots of wildlife. "It's an area that's known for narwhal," says Michael Parady, a paddling enthusiast and executive director of the Trade Association of Paddle Sports. "There are also seals, walrus, [the] potential for polar bears, a caribou herd migrates through there, and lots of birds." www.legendaryex.com.

Burgeo, Newfoundland: There are few roads to the southwest coast of Newfoundland, so all the more reason to explore by kayak. Tim Shuff, editor of *Adventure Kayak* magazine, says the remoteness is just part of the appeal. "You can hike up these big ramps of granite above the ocean and look across the coastline and see nothing but trees and rock and water," he says. www.burgeohaven.com.

Suzanne Morphet is co-author of *The Vancouver Island Book of Everything*. This is an edited version of a feature that appears on the Canadian Tourist Commission's media centre website.

www.au.canada.travel



Majestic scenery: Kayakers rest after savouring some of the sights available only to those who cruise Saguenay Fjord in Quebec

Picture: Tourism Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean/Charles David Robitaille



Kayakers' heaven: Exploring one of the Broken Group Islands, Pacific Rim National Park

CANADA

