



CANOE CAMPING

TIM GENT

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Photographs by Tim and Susannah Gent

First published in 2014

Published in Great Britain 2014 by Pesda Press

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ISBN 978-1-906095-48-2

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Printed and bound in Poland, www.hussarbooks.pl

Dedication

While responsible for everything in this book, including any embedded errors, so much that has found its way in has been the result of teamwork. Although canoe camping makes a fine endeavour for the lone participant – at least one who knows what they're doing – my good fortune has been to undertake all my trips in company.

This has provided me with someone to help lug heaps of kit from van to canoe and from canoe to campsite – and then back again; someone to stand patiently holding a paddle, pan or Prospector (sometimes for a very long time) while I work out camera lens apertures or wait for the sun to finally poke its head around a cloud; someone to take extremely good photos of me; and someone to share each wonderful and sometimes not so wonderful outdoor experience that a shared life of camping, canoeing, hillwalking and everything else has had to offer. Need I say more?

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About the Author

Tim has enjoyed an outdoor life since childhood. Farming, forestry conservation and archaeology have provided a working environment in the field, and contributed to an understanding of the land. While paddling and camping from Arctic Scandinavia to the Mediterranean coast, he has absorbed more, and hopes he is still learning.

Writing about fishing, hillwalking, canoeing and camping, Tim had the first of many magazine articles published in 1990. He is a regular contributor to *Canoe and Kayak UK* and *Bushcraft and Survival Skills*, and often writes for *The Great Outdoors*.

When not camping, Tim and Susannah live in Devon, England, midway between Dartmoor and the Atlantic coast.



Introduction

Early morning sunlight crept across the groundsheet, inching another fine day towards us. Not wanting to miss anything during the short summer night, we'd left the entrance flap open, and the alluring blue-grey flicker of nearby waves soon had us up and out.

Half an hour later, refreshed by tea and filled with homemade muesli, we left our tent to become better acquainted with its little wooded island and paddled across the lake to where a wild river thundered over broad rocky shelves. Fresh from the remains of a distant snowfield, the water was a touch cooler than we'd hoped, but a little further along the pine and birch-studded shore we found a shallow flat-bottomed bay. Here, the bed was a smooth expanse of soft, golden sand, the water warmed by two weeks of almost constant sun. Soon the grime of the last few days' travel was gone.

Of course camping isn't always quite this idyllic. Sat almost exactly over Sweden's little segment of the Arctic Circle, this early August attempt at night must rank as one of our most memorable, but few nights spent under canvas disappoint, and with the correct kit, and armed with a few useful tricks and strategies, even the wildest or coldest nocturnal offering can be as snug and enjoyable as any spent at home.

Few canoeists will pass up the opportunity to spend as much of the day as possible under an open sky, pushing their vessel on as far as tired arms will take it, out to somewhere special. This book is designed to assist all those that, having made their way to where they can breathe deep and witness the world, might wish to prolong the experience by spending the night under the stars. Why turn back at the end of the day when you can pull ashore and create a home? Instead, wake in the morning as the flash and shimmer of the sun reflecting off nearby waves calls you on to another day of exploration and fulfilment.

Of course we canoeists are blessed. Not only do we have a vessel that provides the chance to break free and wander, but we possess a craft that has so much more to offer. When the indigenous people of northern America first developed the canoe they needed a workhorse. Living within a heavily wooded landscape in

which only rivers and lakes offered easy movement, they required something to carry firewood, building materials, baskets of berries or the results of a successful day's hunting. It had to be lightweight, easily repaired with what was available from the nearby forest, yet still able to transport them to the nearest fishing ground or carry the family and all their belongings from one shore to another. I like to think that with time and experiment they produced something of almost unparalleled beauty and practicality.

What we lucky modern canoeists have inherited then is a vessel that has been fine-tuned by need and circumstance over many generations. We own a simple, clean and silent craft that is still just as beautiful and still just as good at moving us around. Importantly, it also remains just as successful at carrying loads, sometimes heavy loads. These cargoes can include almost anything that might improve or enhance our outdoor experience, particularly if the experience we choose is to camp.

Why turn back at the end of the day when you can pull ashore and create a home?



Camping connects us with a not so distant and very significant past. Even us western Europeans, now unquestionably urbanised, have experienced a sedentary existence for only a fraction of our evolution. For most of human existence we have been mobile, making our temporary home where conditions or resources most appeal. Camping is in our blood. Camping almost anywhere a little wild appeals. Spending time under canvas somewhere out of the way touches at those experiences that have formed and fashioned our very character. It can be profoundly satisfying.

Not surprisingly then, my hope is to encourage anyone with even a touch of the explorer about them to head out onto the water with a tent lying happily at the bottom of their canoe. I recognise though that despite this ambition, and an intention to cover as many aspects of canoe camping as possible, I can't cater for every element of basic boat handling and ownership here. There just isn't the space.

This might be a serious concern with regard to those lacking paddling experience. Fortunately however, training in boatcraft is offered by a range of individuals and organisations. Guidance is also available in print, and I can refer you to *Canoeing* by Ray Goodwin, or Bill Mason's classic *Path of the Paddle*. Those fundamental canoeing skills needed before embarking on a camping trip can be found beyond the this book. I don't need to worry if I can't fit everything in.

In the following chapters I hope to offer enough sound advice to allow anyone who has mastered the use of a canoe to put it all into soul-invigorating practice. In short, I hope this book can offer something to all – a guide to those who are already using their canoe to explore, but keen now to know a little more about taking the next step, and also some practical advice to those future canoeists who, after reading it all, feel the need to find somebody to show them how to push off from the shore for the first time.

For some of course it may never be possible to go canoe camping. For them, I hope that the contents of this book might allow for a little of the enjoyment, even if only in the imagination.

How this book is laid out

Some seasoned tent dwellers may well only want to know how to take all their existing camping gear and knowledge, and unite it with a canoe. Others will be informed and practised canoeists, who just haven't yet had the chance to put up a tent at the end of a day's exploration. For those in either group I hope you can overlook the sections where I deal with matters you already know about.

I have split the book into five main sections:

What to take – covering everything from saucepans to spare paddles, tent pegs to torches.

What to take it all in – canoe choice.

How to take everything – the best ways to pack and protect your kit before it meets its transportation, and then how to fit it all in.

Where to go – addressing the question of both where you are able to go, and how best to choose a good trip from the available areas.

Making the most of the journey – discussing ways to make the trip as enjoyable as possible.

What to do when you get there – looking at everything from selecting a campsite, to packing up when you're finally ready to leave. This section considers essential tasks such as cooking and fire management.

Beyond the campsite – considering some of the enjoyable diversions on offer to the successful canoe camper who has made it somewhere a little wild.

How to stay safe – ways to look after yourself on the journey and around the campsite.

Measurements

Many of the canoes we use come from North America, where they still use feet and inches to describe all dimensions. As the habit seems to be maintained over here too, at least with canoes, I will continue to employ these old imperial measurements when discussing them. Keen to avoid confusion though, and because I'm well aware that many readers may be understandably baffled by all this archaic stuff, I will also provide decimal versions in brackets.

Who this book is for

Regardless of what our European ancestors may have got up to in the past, canoe camping as we know and practise it today is principally a North American phenomenon – and a significant body of impressive published advice is already available for the Canadian and US paddler. While I hope that a prospective canoe camper living anywhere in the world will find plenty of useful advice within the covers of this book, the content does have a distinct European if not British slant. This is inevitable. It is where I canoe and camp after all. So while I don't mention the problems of dealing with a resident grizzly bear population for example, I will cover Scottish midges, Swedish mosquitoes and issues specific to European access.

This book is also produced from another particular perspective. If the average Minnesotan or inhabitant of Ontario or Quebec is asked about canoe camping, they will have a very definite activity in mind. For the North American, canoe camping means heading into the wild. I share that view.

Much as I relish any chance to put up a tent at the end of a canoe journey, it is the opportunity to paddle off in search of somewhere as remote and unspoilt as possible that holds the strongest appeal. Wild camping, or putting up a tent up somewhere out of the way and unregulated at the end of a canoe journey, is the activity that forms the principal subject for discussion in the following chapters.

The opportunities to wild camp in the more populated parts of Europe are somewhat limited. It is far from easy for the UK paddler, and not really possible for anyone paddling south of the Scottish border. This being the case, mention will be made of the use of formal waterside campsites – but that mention will be brief. My eyes and thoughts will be drawn to the far empty horizon. It is hoped that those drawn to open this book will understand.

A final comment regarding brands. Having worked my way through a large body of camping kit, rejecting much of it along the way, I feel I am now in the very privileged position of owning products from some of the best camping gear manufacturers out there. If I mention a brand, it is because I trust it, and want others to have the chance to share the benefits. I hasten to add though that I'm not sponsored or paid by any of these companies (although some do ask me to test or review their kit), and hope that this independence confers added validity to any comments I make.



Of course we canoeists are blessed.



Enjoying a northern Swedish late summer sunset from the best seat available.

Beyond The Campsite

So you've managed to wangle some time away from work, you've packed for the off, then repacked a few times, checking and rechecking that you have everything. You, or at least your car or van, has lugged your canoe along many miles of horrendously busy motorway, your eyes glued to the road. You've found your river, lake or chosen stretch of protected coast. Tired arms attest to the hours of paddling to reach your campsite, and skinned knees, scratched calves and a burnt thumb illustrate the effort put into creating a fine new home. Now what?

Walking and clambering

A pretty obvious suggestion really. You can of course see plenty from the canoe, but having found what may be a rather wild and out of the way place, it makes sense, at least to me, to set out on foot to explore. You can either stick to the shore or head inland. It's probably going to be very beautiful whichever way you choose.

You don't need me to tell you what to look for either. I just like to wander, often uphill, simply enjoying the space, and marvelling at the beauty of the available geology, flora and fauna.



All locked and safe (hopefully). Using a surfboard security cable.

To make this easier, and safer, I like to take along a good pair of walking boots and a rucksack. Both will usually fit easily on board. If my map covering the watery bits falls short, I'll also carry something that takes in the land alongside. To make the most of what's on offer I usually have a lightweight pair of binoculars around my neck.

If you plan to indulge in anything a little more adventurous than light hillwalking, particularly in winter conditions, you'll need quite a bit more kit. Then again, if you are contemplating this sort of activity, the aim itself suggests experience, and you therefore don't need my advice.

One problem with pedestrian exploration is canoe and campsite security. Even in the wildest of spots it can be a little alarming to leave everything untended as you set out for the hills. The ideal solution is to have someone in the party who doesn't see the appeal of setting out on foot. In my experience this is rare though, and for those groups in which each member is susceptible to the allure of high or empty ground, one solution is to take it in turns. This can work particularly well when two couples have travelled in a brace of boats. Even this though can be a little frustrating. It is often much more fun to wander together.

Of course if someone really wants to pinch your stuff, then nothing is going to stop them. I must admit that I rarely leave a campsite untended for long. I have done it in some of the wilder parts of northern Sweden, but out on the tundra, you could see the canoe and tent from miles away.

Where we do want to climb, we usually do this before pitching the tent and setting camp. The best system I've developed for protecting the canoe is to use one of those plastic-covered steel cables, the ones with the plastic ball at one end, used by surfers to protect car-top surfboards (see the photo on the left). Threaded through a thwart or two, thrown around a tree and then secured by a lock through both looped ends, some reasonable security is provided. You can even add a few other things such as pfd's to the loop. It is usually possible to find somewhere out of the way to stash other goodies, sometimes covered with stones or dead wood. I haven't forgotten where we put it yet.

Another system for adding security to the more valuable goodies you can't carry with you, is the use of one of the wire-mesh sacks that can be bought at many good outdoor kit shops. Some of these are reasonably big, although also quite expensive. They do offer some form of deterrent. Again not perfect, especially for items that can be wiggled through the gaps, but good for packed tents and holdalls.

Fishing

Looking back I find it hard to picture a time when fishing didn't feature fairly high amongst all the other routine, or not so routine, activities. Each parent and both brothers are keen fly fishers, and my grandfather's family launched themselves onto the North Sea in open boats to make a living catching fish, so this is not perhaps that surprising.



Left: mackerel on a handline off Senja, Norway.
Right: Norwegian cod.



A simple handline setup.



Untangling a handline. My canvas tackle bag is in the canoe.

The result is that very few canoe camping trips, at least at sea, are made without some form of fishing tackle aboard, often including a rod or two. Fortunately these can be shipped fairly easily, and I usually store them in a robust capped plastic tube. All I then take is an old canvas bucket bag, filled with an ever more tangled mess of spare lines, fly boxes, floats and spinners.

Fish can be caught from the shore of course, but in my experience the results are often much better in a canoe, even if only propelled a few yards beyond the usual casting distance. Purpose-built beach casting rods can be abandoned in favour of a shorter lighter version, or even a simple handline. The cost and frustration of tackle lost to weed or rocks can also often be avoided by the simple expedient of paddling just beyond them. A lightweight anchor, especially the easily-stored umbrella type, can be very useful here.

Although I enjoy fly fishing, and spinning, many of the fish I've caught from a canoe have been taken on a handline. Sometimes these are fooled by some choice piece of bait dangled below a float or trundled along the bottom, but perhaps more often by a flashy little spinner trolled behind. It is almost routine for us to offer something gaudy and tempting on the end of a line as we paddle from one beach to another. Left to their own devices these little eye-catching (if you're a fish) contraptions can often improve dinner time. Canoe cruising speeds seem well suited to attract pollock, mackerel and bass. Other canoe catches have included perch and brown trout, and at sea, plaice, sea trout, cod, pouting (and weaver fish!) ... and yes, everything you may have read about the pain from a weaver fish sting is true. After my rather too intimate encounter, a small part of my finger eventually went black and fell off.

Sadly, there will never be enough space here to offer anything but the smallest comment on this vast subject, but I think there is room for a brief introduction to handline use.

Take a standard handline (the gaudy combination of orange plastic frame and braided line available at so many seaside shops will do). Tie a brass swivel onto the

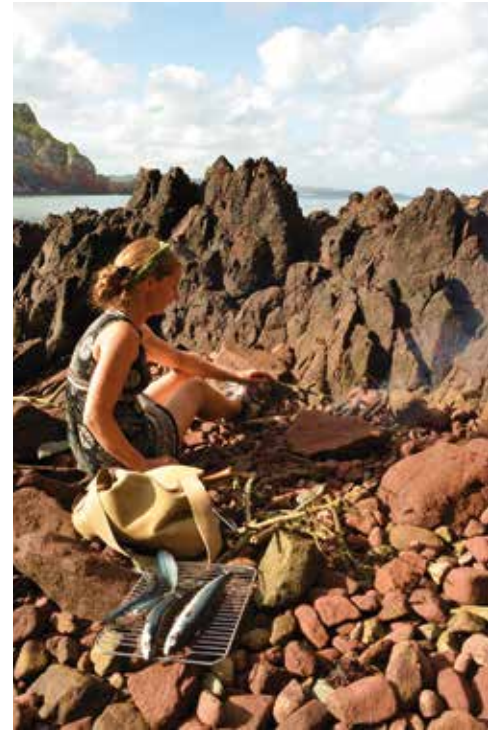
end of the line, and loop a largish stainless steel clip through the attached eye (see the photo below). This clip, available at most angling stores, can be used to hold a lead weight of suitable size (down to experiment I'm afraid). Attaching the weight here also holds the swivel steady to ensure a twist-free fishing line. Then tie a good long length of stoutish monofilament to the free swivel eye (say 5 to 7kg breaking strain), and then add a spinner to the remaining working end. I suggest trying either silver Mepps or Toby (any decent fishing tackle shop will help with the choice).

Once afloat, and in deep enough weed-free water, chuck it all over the side – or nearly all. Hold on to the frame! Now here are the useful bits. To leave your hands free, after letting out a good length of line (experiment again), put the frame under your foot. And to ensure that the whole lot doesn't go over the side if you should hook something interesting, clip the line above your foot through a large climbing karabiner, itself attached to a thwart. Even if your foot comes off the frame during all the paddling fun, the handline frame can't make it past the karabiner. This saves fish, money and tempers.

Mind you, as mentioned before in the food section, any catch should only ever be seen as an addition to a well stocked camping larder. Try not to rely on angling success to provide a meal. It just doesn't always work out that way.

A last comment about licences and permits. If you wish to fish on a river or lake (which will belong to somebody, or at least the fishing rights will) you will need both a rod licence (available from the Post Office and most fishing tackle shops) and permission from the owner (almost always at a cost).

For the moment there is no need for a rod or fishing license on tidal water – unless fishing for salmon or sea trout. Despite this having been the case throughout history – as far as I know – there are mutterings from those that think they know best (or just want to extract more money from us) that they are considering a change to this relaxed and extremely agreeable situation. For what it's worth, here is my plea that things are left as they are.



Cooking the results.

Foraging

Bearing in the mind the need to consider any nourriture trouvé only as welcome additions to a good store of shipped in food, canoes are ideal vessels to go in search of additional edible goodies. This shouldn't come as a surprise of course, as it is exactly what they were designed to do.

While they also had as many other roles as need and the imagination could conjure up, it was primarily to assist fishing, foraging and hunting that the canoe was developed. Reaching out of the way mussel beds might be just one useful example – as helpful a task off Skye or the Devon coast today as it must have been in what we call Nova Scotia over countless previous centuries.

A canoe could transport you to a remote bank, beach, bay or island that had either escaped the predations of other hungry humans, or just happened to provide the best environment for the healthy growth of plant, fish, fowl or beast. This was vital

A canoe can propel you to places that haven't been picked bare by hungry pedestrians.



to early hunter-gatherer communities, and while few of us campers are likely to starve today if we can't find an untouched bed of mussels or woodland packed with ripe pecan nuts (OK, hazelnuts), we can still benefit from a touch of foraging ourselves. Not only is the chance to rekindle some of these ancient skills enjoyable and valuable in itself, but the results can be pretty pleasant too.

So what's on offer to the peckish canoeist? Well at first glance the inland hunter-gatherer may seem to be at no great advantage from being afloat. With such seemingly unexciting water-edge snacks as bulrushes on the menu, you might feel it worth staying on shore. But then a canoe can also take you to islands dotted with untouched cep, chanterelle, blackberries or wild garlic. It can also propel you to quiet and overgrown sections of lake or river, inaccessible to the land-tied forager or angler. In the same way that the canoe once provided access to areas beyond those picked bare by the hungry pedestrian, today it is possible to reach virtually unvisited sections of shore where elderberries and even rabbits and trout flourish untouched.

Despite all this, it is along and just off the coast that I devote most of my efforts. Once an inbuilt love of the sea is taken into account, there are probably two additional reasons. Firstly, although I enjoy eating trout and even carp, eels and pike, I'd far sooner put something finny on my plate that has spent its days in the salty stuff. And while I prefer the taste of sea fish, I can also go in search of bass, mackerel or plaice without worrying about the rod licences or permits mentioned above. Sea fishing is much more easy-going. All this freedom suits me, and while you can pick and gather all manner of wonders inland, that type of fishing needs paperwork. And then, let's face it, the appallingly limited access to our rivers and lakes in my home country hardly improves the situation. It's not surprising I tend to head for the coast where you have all those maritime delicacies on offer.

Coastal foods can probably be broken down into five basic groups – fish, shellfish, crustaceans, plants and seaweed. A slightly arbitrary list, and open to debate and adjustment no doubt, but isn't that half the fun of lists.



Collecting dulse.



Collecting mussels from north Cornwall.

Fish have been mentioned. For the gathering of all sorts of edible plants, seaweeds and shellfish, the canoe can also take you to the best and hopefully least visited spots, and carry your spoils back to the campsite. I think my favourite meal of this type to date must be bass wrapped in tin foil, their gutty bits replaced with wild fennel from the overhanging cliff top (note – a good knife and a roll of tinfoil already lay amongst my cooking kit. Oh yes, and a lemon).

Mind you there was also a very good brown crab caught close to a low cliff near Torquay. This was memorable perhaps not so much for the resultant meal, which was excellent, as for seeing Susannah race to win her tasty prize. We'd spotted this rather ample crustacean pottering amongst the seaweed across a narrow rock platform about four or five feet down. The problem was that so had a large grey seal swimming through deep water alongside. Susannah took one look at the crab, another at the seal, which made the mistake of hesitating, before she was in and submerged, to resurface moments later with her catch. I'm not sure whether the look on the seal's face showed surprise or admiration.

If bass and brown crab don't do it for you, perhaps the following items on the menu will whet a few appetites – cockles, winkles, shrimps, prawns, the lovely and under-rated razor clam and lobster.

Many edible coastal plants and seaweeds take some cooking, but small amounts of the fresh new growth from sea purslane, sea beet or perennial wall rocket can make a particularly good addition to a salad. Gutweed may not sound very appetising, but is worth the effort (just), and dulse, the easy to identify red seaweed is simple to collect and cook (steam lightly) and really is very enjoyable to eat. Laver, or 'what a paLaver' as it is known in the family, tastes pretty good (although not all agree), but unless you are prepared to hang around a fire or stove for hours until it is properly cooked, using alarming amounts of fuel, it is pretty hard to justify as a campsite meal.

Lovers of a variety of crustaceans will enjoy the ease in which their canoe will put them in touch with remote and rarely foraged shrimp and prawn homes. They are also simple to cook. All that's needed is a suitable net.

A canoe really comes into its own when used to transport a pot or two to a quiet location. Proper crab and lobster pots are fairly big, and it probably won't be possible to take one camping, unless you have an eighteen foot canoe or longer. Best leave these for non-camping trips. Prawn pots are smaller though, especially the canoe-friendly collapsible variety. Not forgetting that prawns won't be found in close to the beach until late spring, and gone again in autumn, a well-placed pot can provide a satisfying meal.

Remember though that there are a shrinking number of hard-hit fishermen trying to make a living from these tasty wee (and not so wee) beasties. Try not to use any spot more than once, at least in any summer. It might be worth attaching a label to your marker buoy or pot explaining this, and the fact that you are only after something for your own table. Sadly, this may still not stop a pot disappearing if you set it out of sight. I suggest laying it within view of your campsite or afternoon picnic spot, with a return within a few hours.

You may think that anything on the shore, or just off it, is fair game, but it's not alas as simple as that, at least in the UK. For a start, all shore or beach is owned by someone



Setting a collapsible prawn pot early in the morning.



Foraging in Scandinavia. Hjordron, or Cloudberries.

– although free access is usually accepted (and this free access is now enshrined in law in Scotland). On the other hand, anyone who tells you that any form of foraging is unlawful, has also got the wrong end of the stick. The truth lies somewhere between the two, wrapped up in all sorts of legal fuss that only British lawyers could sustain, and further complicated by various regional and local rules and byelaws.

What I can say is that collecting plants is fine. Assuming you only cut off a little of each, don't damage them or dig anything up (which rules out sea holly roots for example), and you leave rare things such as wild cabbage alone (well, perhaps the very occasional leaf), plants are on the menu. Seaweed is a grey area (actually, if it is grey don't eat it). While plant collection is fine under common law and statute (fruit, fungi, flowers and foliage are in) seaweed isn't classed as a plant in law, at least in the matter of collection (metaphorical throwing up of hands). Collecting shellfish is classed as fishing, and therefore permissible within tidal waters. Watch out though, bivalves such as oysters and clams, even mussels, are often grown within private fisheries. Best to check. While at it, find out if there are any local byelaws, and check the minimum size limits, closed seasons and even net mesh sizes for shellfish and crustaceans. These too can vary from area to area. Size limits and other restrictions also apply (quite rightly) to many fish, not least the hard hit bass.

On a happier note, foraging in Scandinavia is bound up in far fewer, if any, restrictions – if food is collected for your own use.

While aware that I could put you off trying any of this foraging, and I really don't want to, I must mention the risk of poisoning. Sadly, this is no idle threat, and people really do manage to inflict some nasty mischief on themselves every year, even those who probably should know better. Mistaking hemlock water dropwort for innocent (and I think, overly tasty) alexanders for example is a mistake you'd probably only make once. So the old adage – eat only things that you are absolutely certain about – is one well worth adhering to. The best way to gain this knowledge is to spend a fair bit of time in the wild with someone who knows (really knows) what they are about.

After all this, I must stress that the pleasure to be had from collecting your own food from the wild is well worth it, particularly if you have given your canoe a chance to

shine in its true calling. Free camping food can be yours, and extremely good food at that. If you don't have a wild food specialist amongst your friends, the next best approach for increased safety and fun is a collection of good books. If you refer to these constantly, and leave anything you are still even vaguely unsure about, you really should be fine. We bought *Food for Free*, written by Richard Mabey, back so long ago I can't even remember the date. It's a good place to start. Ray Mears (you may have heard of him) can always be relied on. Finally, John Wright's *Edible Seashore*, published in 2009 by Bloomsbury is a star, and I wish I'd had it in a dry bag years ago.

A few additional hints and suggestions:

- Carry lots of bags to avoid everything getting mixed up – plastic keeps everything in the canoe dry and food free, but isn't always the best thing for your catch (fabric bags can breathe).
- A big plastic bucket is very useful to put your bags in (empty or full) – and also makes a good bailer.
- A knife or scissors are good for seaweed collection (if you leave the stem, and only take some of the fronds, they can grow you another meal).
- In the same vein, try to take only a small proportion of any wild food – and find out about size limits and closed seasons (for fish and shellfish).
- Watch your feet – it is easy to squish things you aren't looking for.
- With shellfish, stick to the old 'only collect when there's an R in the month' adage (and because canoeing needs you, learn how to clean your shellfish before cooking).
- At the risk of going on a bit – keep an eye on the tide.
- And once again for good measure – if you're not sure, don't eat it.



If you're not sure, don't eat it.

CANOE CAMPING

TIM GENT

Tim Gent shares his enthusiasm for and experience of travelling and camping from a canoe.

He covers planning a journey, selecting the right canoe and equipment and discusses ways to pack it all in your craft. All the traditional skills of campcraft such as fire lighting, cooking on an open fire, campsite selection and many more are explored, while more modern approaches to kit and techniques are not overlooked.

You will be inspired to paddle off into the distance and experience the joys of a waterborne nomadic existence ... even if only for a break from our modern sedentary lifestyle.

ISBN 9781906095482



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**A thoroughly modern book
on the traditional canoe.**