

Always wear a Buoyancy Aid

A buoyancy aid should be worn for every canoeing activity, regardless of how well you can swim. Should you capsize it will keep you afloat and unlike a lifejacket, you can easily swim to help yourself. No one has drowned from a canoe close to the bank on simple water, whilst wearing a buoyancy aid. A buoyancy aid is probably the most important piece of safety kit you'll invest in so don't just rush out and buy the first one you see. Treat it with respect and it will last a long time.

Buoyancy Aid or Life Jacket?

Life jackets are designed to keep you floating the right way up but are generally too bulky to swim in, let alone paddle, so a buoyancy aid is the natural choice for the canoeist. Canoeing buoyancy aids are foam-filled not air-filled.

What must a Buoyancy Aid do?

It should:

Be CEN 50N Standard minimum and correctly sized.

Be comfortable to wear, so that your body is free to move but tight enough so that it does not come up over your head when you are in the water.

Be suitable for the particular paddlesport you would like to do.

Choose a buoyancy aid that carries the CEN 393 Standard label of approval.

Additional points to consider:

Buoyancy aids should be brightly coloured, so that you can easily be seen. Its main role is to save your life should you capsize, not as a pillow when you stop for lunch.

Buoyancy aids that pull on over the head and those with front openings are equally suitable.

The aid should fit you snugly and have a belt or drawcord to secure it at the waist.

Before buying a buoyancy aid, check that you can sit and move comfortably in your canoe or kayak while wearing it. Make a point of practicing swimming in your buoyancy aid.

Look after your buoyancy aid; keep it clean, do not crush it and store it in a cool place.

A buoyancy aid also provides excellent insulation against the cold.

And last, but not least, does it have a pocket for the all-important chocolate bar (and anything else you need with you)?