

# The 100 best paddling places

An ICF competition called for votes to claim the best 100 paddling places in the world. The top three were:



## 1 Minaouët River, Brittany, France.

A pretty river dotted with inlets and turquoise coves leads to a stretch of glorious coast strung with white beaches in this wild and artistic part of Brittany. The river flows through countryside northwest of Pont-Aven (a village made famous by post Impressionist artists such as Paul Gauguin), west to Pont Minaouët, past the sailing boats and out to sea at Pointe de Grignallou. White sand beaches line the coast, making a gorgeous location for paddlers progressing to moving water. This secret gem is a favourite playground of Hector Henot, the French canoe sprint athlete, and was a slam dunk with the judges who gave it top ratings on every category, tranquillity, beauty, excitement, uniqueness and accessibility.

## 2 Emerald Lake, Yoho National Park, British Columbia, Canada.

The colour of the water is everything at this astonishing water body in the Canadian Rockies. Surrounded by the glaciated peaks of the President Range, Emerald Lake is tinted a vivid peacock blue green, thanks to the silty glacial meltwater that refills it each summer. It's the largest of 61 lakes in the Yoho National Park, famed for its vertical rock faces, waterfalls, rare pine tree species and as a habitat for grizzly bears and mountain goats. Around its fringes wild orchids grow, moose graze on surrounding meadows and there are views of the important 508,000,000 year old Burgess Shale fossil beds. It's a dreamy paddle spot for nature lovers and photographers with calm, cool waters on which even beginners can try a session.



## 3 Valle Verzasca, Ticino, Switzerland

In an isolated valley running for 26km in the underrated Ticino region, the Verzasca river is an epic route for experienced canoeists and kayak paddlers. While the upper section is much easier, the lower part is an experts only pinball rally of waterfalls, drops, chutes, granite boulders and narrow churning rapids through spectacular gorges. Thrills abound round here. At the top of the valley the Verzasca Dam is one of Europe's most recognisable bungee jump sites, featured in the James Bond film Goldeneye. Down river near Lavertezzo, divers of one sort leap from the Ponte dei Salti bridge into deep tranquil green pools while scuba divers explore the depths.

British locations (with our guides) were;

## 13 Basingstoke Canal, Hampshire (*Canoeist's first guide, Jan 83/Canals of Britain*)

Perhaps a surprising entry to folk who know Basingstoke as an average English market town but its canal won over the judges through the gorgeous photographs taken by our tipper, Gill Ryan, while paddling through autumn leaves on this mirrorlike waterway. A section of the canal between Up Nately and the Greywell Tunnel is a nature reserve, then it continues east to join the Wey Navigation, connecting to the River Thames.



## 19 Durdle Door, Dorset (*Jun 03/Coastal Britain: England & Wales*)

The iconic Durdle Door on the Jurassic Coast is one of Dorset's and, indeed, the United Kingdom's most celebrated coastal beauty spots, a perfect limestone arch rising above the waves next to a golden crescent beach. Paddling through the gap under the arch and getting a photo while doing it is a must do for kayakers coming to the area.

## 51 Old Harry Rocks, Dorset (*Mar 03/Coastal Britain: England & Wales*)

The paddle out to Old Harry Rocks, a series of prominent chalk towerlike formations off the white cliff coast of Dorset is a favourite among locals and a fun short expedition for families with older children to try. Nearby Studland Bay has gorgeous beaches to cruise by and lies at the eastern end of the Jurassic Coast, where dinosaur fossils are frequently revealed.

## 68 Lake District (*More British Navigations, free download*)

There's no shortage of good paddling in this rainy, mountainous region and national park in the north of England; the clue's in the name. From the deep and somewhat intimidating Wastwater, backed by near vertical scree slopes, to Windermere, England's largest lake, there are many stunning water bodies for hammering out distance sessions or trying a beginners' trip. Paddling twins who provided us with several great tips recommend the tranquil, glassy waters of Buttermere.

## 78 Cape Wrath, Sutherland (*Dec 95/Coastal Scotland*)

Wildly beautiful and one of the most remote parts of mainland Great Britain, Cape Wrath, at its most northwesterly corner, with the vast white sand beach of Sandwood to the south, is an otherworldly outpost. Huge cliffs topped with an iconic lighthouse are spectacular for an expert sea kayak paddler to survey from beneath.

## 80 South Devon (*Dec 03/Coastal Britain: England & Wales/Rivers of Britain*)

The charming south Devon coastline is pocked with pretty bays and coves that are a joy to explore for paddlers of all standards. Beginners might prefer the calm water of the River Dart, which winds from the fishing and sailing harbour of Dartmouth past pubs and historic buildings to the hippyish town of Totnes. Our tipper, Rhi, recommends the gorgeous beaches of Blackpool Sands to the south of the river and Bodsand Beach to the north.

## 88 Isle of Wight (*Coastal Britain: England & Wales*)

Off England's south coast near Hampshire, the jolly Isle of Wight draws holidaymakers with its beaches, bays and coastal walking. Paddlers with sea experience can head out under high white cliffs and around the Needles chalk stacks. Solid kayak paddlers have been known to tackle a 100km circumnavigation of the island in a day or cross the busy shipping channel to the Isle of Wight from Hayling Island, attached to the mainland. Photographers Leon Butler and Stephen Perfect both tipped about loving it here.