



Boats Float!

Find floating materials, build a toy boat, and test it in the water.

Note: Always supervise small children near water.

Materials Needed:

Pan or tub of water, various floating materials (plastic containers or lids, straws, wood sticks, aluminum foil, foam, cork, birch bark, etc.), fastening materials (glue, tape, rubber bands, string, etc.), small toys or paper figures, straw to make “wind”, towel for drying.

Instructions:

Step 1: Fill a pan or tub with water. Gather various materials, and let your child test various materials to find the ones that float. For very young children, this may be the whole activity!

Step 2: Build a boat together. Help your child select materials to make a small boat. Glue and popsicle sticks work well, but may need to dry overnight. Other materials like plastic lids, aluminum foil, or rubber bands will make a boat that can be used right away. Experiment with different designs.

Step 3: Test your boat on the water! Place a small toy or a paper figure inside as a passenger. Blow wind through a straw to move the boat. How well did your boat float?

Step 4: Make adjustments to your design. Not all boats will float perfectly the first time. Use your problem-solving skills to help them keep afloat!



Water Travel in Alaska

People have been traveling across Alaska's landscapes for thousands of years, and one of the most common ways to travel is by water. Oceans and rivers are Alaska's highways. Explore different vehicles people use to travel on water!

Many people use small **boats** to travel on rivers in Interior Alaska. These boats are usually around 20 feet long and made of aluminum. Some boats have roofs to protect passengers from the weather, while others are open to the elements. People use these boats for fishing, hunting, traveling to seasonal camps and other communities, and recreation.



Boats on the Nowitna River. Photos by Emily Koehler-Platten.

Canoes are another popular vehicle for traveling on rivers. In Interior Alaska, Athabascan peoples traditionally made canoes from birch bark. Canoe makers stitched the bark hull together with split spruce roots, sealed the seams with hot spruce sap, and built the birch or willow frame inside. Different sizes and shapes of canoes were used for different purposes, such as hunting, fishing, and moving from camp to camp. Although modern canoes are made of different materials, some companies still use the same canoe designs.

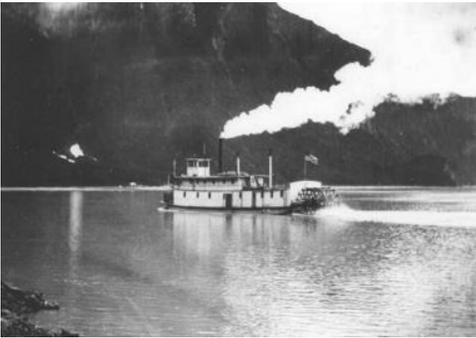


Birch Bark Canoe by Jimmie Charlie: EH0991-0001.



NPS Photo - Andrew Cattoir

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*Steamboat on the Copper River, 1908.
UAF Archives, UAF-2003-163-36m.*

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, **steamboats** were a common sight on Alaska rivers. As the discovery of gold brought thousands of people north, steamboats were the best way to transport people and goods during the summer months. Most steamboats could carry between 150 and 500 passengers at a time. The steamboat era in Alaska lasted until 1955, when the *SS Nenana* made its last trip.

In 1901, trader E.T Barnette traveled up the Tanana River on the steamboat *Lavelle Young*. When the boat ran into shallow water, the captain offloaded Barnette and his supplies on the banks of the Chena River. This was the beginning of the city of Fairbanks!



*SS Nenana sternwheeler in Fairbanks.
Wikimedia Commons.*



*Above: Umiak, Wainwright,
ca. 1945-1949
UAMN: 0538-0001A.*

Umiaks, large open boats designed to carry several people, are a part of Iñupiat and Yup'ik cultures. A wooden frame is covered with split walrus or bearded seal hides and sewn together with caribou sinew. Hunters use umiaks for bowhead whale, walrus, and seal hunting. Today, they mostly use outboard motors instead of paddles and sails. Although some people have switched to using metal boats, umiaks are still an important part of their culture.



*Right: Hunters paddling an umiak.
Photo courtesy of Alaska Eskimo
Whaling Commission.*

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In many regions of Alaska, people use **kayaks** (also spelled *qayaq*) to travel through ocean waters, hunt, fish, and transport supplies. Kayaks are small lightweight watercraft that could hold one, two, or three people. They are traditionally made from driftwood covered in seal or sea lion skins. Different regions and communities have different kayak designs, each suited to their particular needs. Today, kayaks are usually made from plastic or fiberglass. Kayaking is a common recreational activity today.



Yup'ik style kayak, pre-1966. UA87-011-0002.



NPS Photo – K. Miller

Many people in coastal communities rely on **ferries** for transportation. These large boats carry people, vehicles, and cargo on a regular schedule. In Alaska, the state ferry system currently provides service to over 30 communities across southern Alaska. Some ferries make daily trips to neighboring communities, while bigger ferries sail thousands of miles from Alaska to British Columbia and Washington. Larger ferries might have cabins for overnight stays, observation lounges, and even restaurants!



MV Malaspina in 2013. Photo courtesy Alaska Department of Transportation.



NPS photo.

Winter Travel

Frozen rivers make excellent roads in the winter! People use snowmobiles, dogsleds, and cars to travel on the ice. However, they must be careful not to travel on ice too late into springtime, as melting ice can be dangerous.