

by Christopher Cunningham

Yak-a-Launcher

A dock, the place that is easiest for getting aboard most boats, is a most awkward place to get in and out of a kayak. Floating docks are bad enough when they are only a few inches higher than the deck of a kayak, but docks fixed on pilings that get higher as the tide drops can be unapproachable. The Yak-A-Launcher is designed to make it easier for kayakers who have to rely on docks or seawalls for access to the water.

The Yak-A-Launcher is a pair of rotomolded floats joined at the bottom by three aluminum poles. The poles have foam-padded sleeves that act as rollers when a kayak is moved in and out of the launcher. Across the top is a frame that serves as a handrail. The whole thing tipped the scales at 48 pounds. I could assemble it in a little over five minutes and take it apart in 90 seconds.

You float the launcher at the water's edge and secure it to the dock with a pair

of lines. After you slip the kayak into the water, you slide it into the Yak-A-Launcher. With the cockpit centered and the bowline (one is supplied if you don't have one) tied off to the handrail you can step aboard. I could stand on a single float and with my 200 pounds aboard it still had about two inches of freeboard. From the float I could step into the cockpit. The kayak I was using had a slightly V-shaped hull and didn't sit level on the rollers. On a beach I'd normally put my paddle across the aft deck and out to one side but in the launcher I just let the kayak settle at an angle. With my feet in the cockpit I could hang on to the handrail and lower myself into the seat. Having the bowline tied to the handrail kept the kayak from scooting forward. Once I was settled in and had my spray deck in place I could secure the bowline and push out of the launcher either forward or backward. Backing out in this particular kayak was a little less stable than going forward, especially if I moved slowly. As the bow approached the roller the kayak leaned a bit to the side. If I rolled back quickly the moment of instability went by almost without notice.

The Yak-A-Launcher web site notes that the unit is portable. It weighs a little less than most kayaks and I found it fairly easy to put in the water and take out. It will fit in a square-back vehicle with folding rear seats like my Blazer. If you're going to travel with the Yak-A-Launcher you'll need to find a place where you can leave it in the water while you're out paddling. If you're lucky enough to have your own dock, of course, you can leave the Yak-A-Launcher in place throughout the paddling season. **SK**



Sea Kayaker Magazine

Originally published in *Sea Kayaker*
magazine's August 2010 issue.
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