

# Kayaking Livingstone's Lake of Storms



Mike Lamb  
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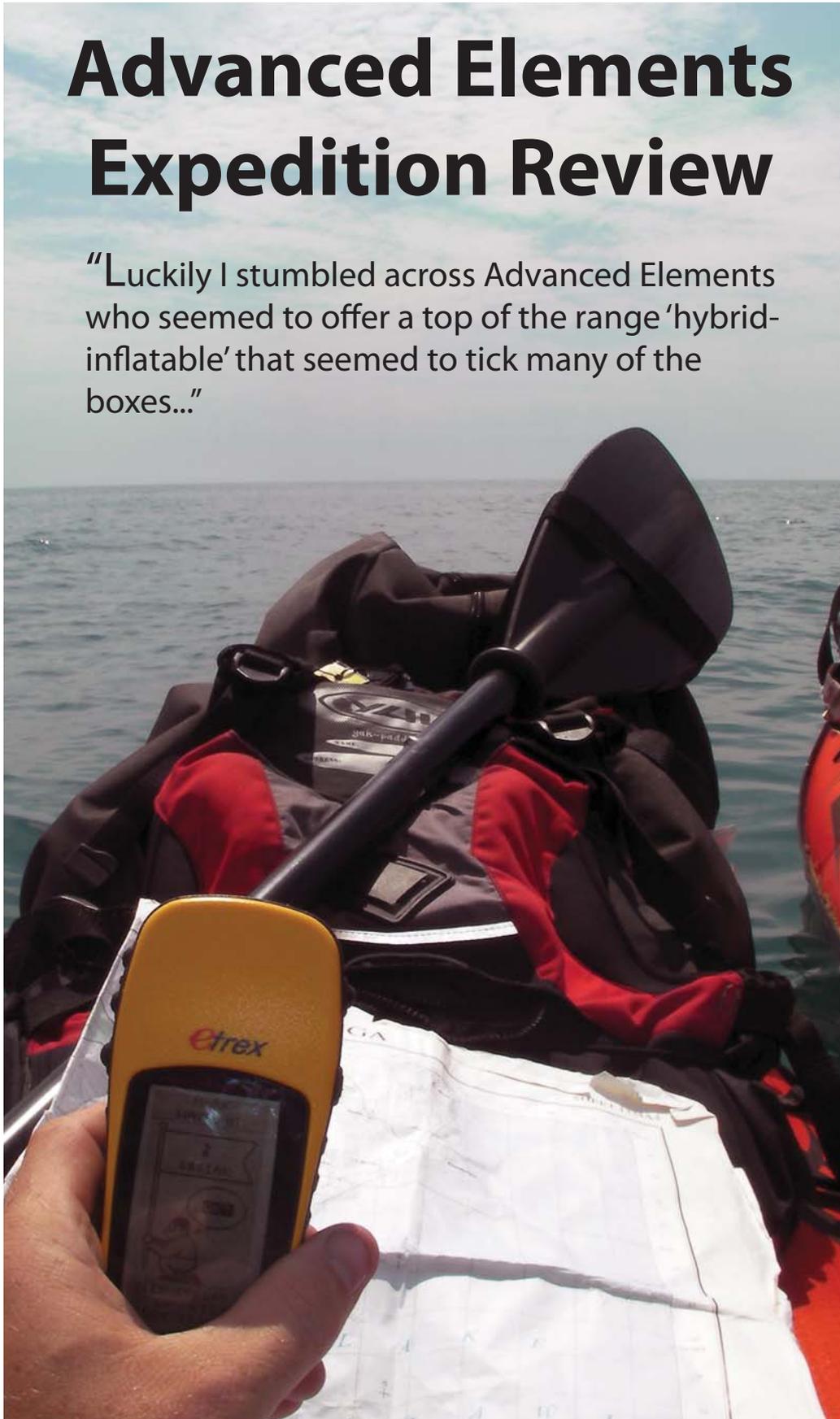
## Advanced Elements Expedition Review

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In February 2009 the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust awarded me a fellowship to complete an expedition that I had been planning for several years. The expedition was to retrace a route taken by David Livingstone across Lake Malawi some 150 years ago. Along the way I wanted to use my skills and experience to make a difference to the country that was going to host me and so I arranged to meet and work with teachers and schools along the route. As a qualified teacher and carrying environmental education materials I hoped to make some kind of contribution.

When I was contacted by the Trust in February the serious planning started. I had only ever kayaked once or twice before and so learning the skills required for the journey became my first priority. Luckily the outdoor education department (Fred and Dan) at my school (Hurstpierpoint College) supported me with this, as did Martlet Kayak Club and their many instructors headed up by Dai Thomas. With their help and guidance I ventured from the warmth of the school swimming pool to the murky Ardingly Reservoir and eventually the unforgiving English Channel.

As well as learning to kayak, arranging the logistics for my travel and all the other planning required, it is essential that I sourced the right equipment and most importantly the right kayak for the job. I would be kayaking some 300km over approximately three weeks, carrying a substantial amount



of kit in what could be considered 'sea' conditions. Despite being landlocked the lake can be incredibly dangerous and was once dubbed the 'Lake of Storms' by David Livingstone. July/August is also the windy season and swell of several metres is not at all unusual at this time of year. Not to mention that crocodiles, hippos and tropical diseases abound in the area.

During my training I was lucky enough to try several types of kayaks to start to get an idea of what would be required. However not only did I need the right vessel for the conditions but it soon became apparent that I would also have to get it there. Through my research I soon realised that a collapsible or inflatable kayak would provide the flexibility that I needed. The ability to pack the boat in a bag not only meant that the air travel would be easier but transport at both ends would be manageable and this also provided flexibility if there were problems on route.

I contacted various people and trawled forums and noticeboards finding the very useful [www.foldingkayaks.org](http://www.foldingkayaks.org) which has a regular group of knowledgeable contributors. Due to the cost of many folding kayaks I started to seriously consider an inflatable. Considered by many to be unresponsive, heavy and poor in the wind I was sceptical. On top of this availability in the UK was limited.

Luckily I stumbled across Advanced Elements who seemed to offer a top of the range 'hybrid-inflatable' that seemed to tick many of the boxes. Nick Pipe at Vortex, one of the few stockists in the UK, was very swift in his response and exceptionally



**Advanced Elements Expedition Kayak**  
**“Now sat some 350 km from where we started I feel content, satisfied and very tired...”**

helpful and enthusiastic about my adventure. He kindly offered to send down an Advanced Elements Advanced Frame Expedition kayak. To allay any concerns about whether it would have sufficient space for packing kit he offered to send it down with no obligation to buy as well as throwing in some extras for free. A very kind offer although I did feel a bit stupid sitting in one in my very small living room one Thursday evening in spring.

Practice paddles from Brighton beach soon showed that the kayak was very easy to assemble and launch, handled well in small waves and had enough space for the kit that I would need. The boat was very stable which was considered a huge benefit considering I would be carrying all of my kit and also as myself and

my paddling partner were relatively inexperienced. It was also exceptionally easy to enter from the water. After several runs the kayak (and a second I had subsequently purchased) was deflated, cleaned and packed for Malawi. With a decent weight allowance (which is not supplied by South African Airways) you can check-in an Advanced Frame Expedition onto a plane as packed down it fits into a large holdall and weighs around 23kg. Despite

the preparations I arrived at the lake still nervous as to how the three week long trip would progress.

Now sat some 350 km from where we started I feel content, satisfied and very tired. As an inexperienced kayaker I am unable to compare the kayaks that we used with many other models. However what I do know is that two inexperienced kayakers carrying all of our kit (around 30kg each) travelled over

**For more information on this expedition and others see:**

**[www.inspire-worldwide.com](http://www.inspire-worldwide.com)**

300km on lake/sea conditions with swell up to two metres, covering over 30km on good days. The boats provided sufficient kit space, were very stable in swell and breaking waves and generally tracked well. In strong winds I am sure they didn't track as well as a hard shell kayak and probably required more effort to paddle, but for our purposes they were perfect.

The zips on top offered easy access to kit, even when on the water, although they did let small amounts of water drip in on long days. The inflatable floor and seat actually meant for a relatively comfortable seating position and when sitting the backbone running the length of the boat and any water in the bottom of the kayak could not be felt. The three part paddle was not the lightest but again it did the job adequately. Deck space on top allowed for a large bag meaning that we had enough kit to travel unassisted several days with no worries.

In summary, for the expedition that we carried out, the Advanced Frame Expedition did the job perfectly. I am sure that there are better boats out there, but if you don't have an endless amount of cash then these are great value for money. I sourced two new boats, paddles, backbones, seats and floors for less than I would have been able to buy one new collapsible kayak. Having completed the expedition only now can I feel smug about that. Clearly if you want to cross the Atlantic then don't buy one of these. Alternatively if you want something that packs away, is stable on the water and you are going to be using it on flattish water then



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these kayaks really should be considered. With summer now cooling off the kayaks are wrapped up in bags and packed away in the cupboard, but as soon as the sun shines I will be back down Brighton Beach, pump and paddle in hand.

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**ADVANCED ELEMENTS** 

*"A big thank you to Mike Lamb for this report on his kayak trip across Lake Malawi with feedback on how the Advanced Elements Expedition kayaks performed on the trip".*

Nick Pipe ~ Vortex

[www.advancedelementskayaks.co.uk](http://www.advancedelementskayaks.co.uk)