

CONN YAK

C O N N E C T I C U T S E A K A Y A K E R S

January 2003

WHY A WOODEN KAYAK

By Nick Shade

The fog starts to lift as you leave the island where you camped. As you head out across the bay a seal pops up to see who is crossing its territory. Out to the right you hear a porpoise exhale. You carry all you need, self sufficient, dependent on no one. You look with satisfaction down at your deck, evaluating the selection of wood, wondering if you should rearrange the deck lines, thinking about new hatch systems. You are paddling a kayak you built yourself.

There are not many things that you can make that will take you as far as a kayak. While some people can make a motorcycle or an airplane, they are not a project suitable to the average basement or garage workshop. A marginally handy individual can make a highly functional kayak without sophisticated tools or skills.

There are lots of reasons why you might want to build your own kayak, from saving money to getting a pretty boat, but the most compelling reason is the satisfaction you get from being out on the water in a craft you made with your own hands. This satisfaction is

enhanced by the fact that yours is almost always the prettiest kayak in your group. It is also likely that your boat will be one of the lightest and least expensive. But, the reason to build a wooden kayak is because in this age of pre-packaged dinners there are few opportunities to make a high quality product by yourself.

Why You Shouldn't Build a Kayak.

Don't take on the project just to save money. The materials to build a high quality wood kayak generally costs less than a similar pre-manufactured boat, but that doesn't include your time. Kayak kit manufacturers will quote times as low as 45 hours to build a relatively simple design. While they are not lying, they are probably being a little optimistic for the average beginning builder.

The average person with a job and family obligations may have difficulty finding the time. The work is satisfying and should be relaxing. If you go into the project thinking you will bang out a boat in short order and be ready to paddle in no time, you may end up frustrated. If you see the time spent building as a chance to slow down, learn new skills and relax, you are more likely to enjoy it. Before you commit yourself to trying to build a kayak as a thing of beauty, consider how you want to use it. They are pretty, but that can sometimes interfere with their practicality. If you

have spent all winter obsessing over making a gorgeous kayak, you may be reluctant to subject it to the bumps and grinds inevitable when using a kayak. If it is used, your kayak will get scratched and beat up.

There is nothing wrong with wanting to put your best effort into making a beautiful kayak. You just need to realize that perfection takes time. As a result, while you can make a very nice looking kayak quite quickly, it takes a very long time to make a drop-dead gorgeous one. If you start the project with the attitude that it is just a boat to be used, you will probably be overwhelmed with how pretty it comes out. If you go into the project hoping to achieve perfection, you may be disappointed with the inevitable flaws.

Why You Should Build A Kayak

A wooden kayak is not a compromise. It can be just as strong as a pre-manufactured plastic, fiberglass or Kevlar boat. In fact a wooden kayak often is as strong as a fiberglass kayak. Most of the building techniques incorporate fiberglass into the finished boat as reinforcement. The difference is, the wood serves as a core material between layers of glass. This makes a boat that is generally stiffer than other kayaks. While it is possible to scratch through the outer layer of glass to expose the wood core to water, it is hard to break completely through a wooden kayak. Most scratches are just cosmetic

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Yes, you can do tricks in a wood boat too. Nick Shade doing a balance brace (euro-style) Photo - Tom Maziarz

and don't harm the boat.

The wood-fiberglass composite creates a structure that is relatively lightweight for its strength. It will be easier to paddle and more responsive than other, heavier kayaks. And a lighter boat is much easier to load on the car and carry down to the put-in

Building your own boat provides you with all the skills to fix it should the worst happen. You will know intimately how the boat goes together and what needs to be done to put it back together should it break.

Making the kayak yourself lets you customize it exactly to your needs. Many of the building methods let you do simple tweaks of the design to get the performance you want. If you have unusual desires the kayak designers are often willing to create a custom design specifically suited to your needs. And as you build you can outfit the boat to meet your specific needs. If you want extra deck lines or a fishing rod holder, you don't need to negotiate with the manufacturer to get what you want.

The beauty of wood is undeniable. It has a visual richness that is only seen in natural materials. It does not take any particular skill to make wood look good. It is a forgiving material. The texture of the grain hides many mistakes. The real advantage of wood is it permits you to do it all yourself without sophisticated tools or skill. It is possible to make a full-fiberglass kayak at home, but it is a much more involved project. If the idea of moving across in the water in a craft you put together with your own hands appeals to you, making a wooden kayak is the best way to do it. The time spent in the basement will feel well spent when you place the boat in the water and head out across the bay.

FIRST NEWSLETTER FOUND

Stan Kegeles found the 1st ConnYak Newsletter dated May '94 which describes the first meeting with 15 members. The Masthead read "whatchamacallit" since selecting a name for the club was on the agenda.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

At the January meeting we will have the (re-election) of officers. Every officer is willing to keep their current position, however anyone can offer their desire to be an officer. We are a Democracy and change is always desirable if somebody would like to serve the club in any way. Otherwise we will do our yearly formality of an election.

BUILT FOR COMFORT

by Jay Babina

Wood kayak builders aren't the only ones who have to address the problem of making a seat and kayak that fits them well. It's quite often that new and seasoned kayakers complain that their legs fall asleep, and occasionally get that uncomfortable sore cramping that can occur if the accommodations don't entirely agree with your body.

If you have the type of bottom that can sit on a piece of concrete for hours, you're in luck. But for most of us, sitting in that ergonomically unfriendly position for extended periods takes a few things that need to be developed. One is the seat, and foot position and two, is developing your body into that of a kayaker.

Number two first. In most kayakers, the section of the brain that acknowledges discomfort in the bottom and legs becomes numb or desensitized as the years of kayaking go on. And in most cases, other surrounding areas of the brain, such as those that have to do with monetary obligations are similarly affected.

Seriously, it's quite noticeable that experienced kayakers can usually paddle more different boats with less discomfort than any new or non-kayaker. Just as in any sport, our body adapts or gets trained to sit in the extended leg position. Our tendons, and muscles get conditioned for the paddling posture. We can add to this conditioning by regular stretching exercises of the legs and back. Stretching the calves regularly will also help condition us since the entire stressed area runs from our heels to the back of our neck. All good athletes cross-train and with kayaking, some stretching exercises will not only help in our fitness but greatly increase the comfort level in our kayaks for extended periods.

The number one kayaking comfort mechanism is your seat. (as well as the one in the kayak) When I had my first Necky Arluk III with a flat slab of foam for a seat, I could paddle for about 45 minutes and would have to get out for a stretch. It did not agree with me at all. The discomfort was not in my bottom but in my thighs. When my brother bought a Pintail with the hard plastic molded tractor type seat, I couldn't believe the comfort. It was lower volume which meant my legs were in a straighter, more demanding position, yet I could paddle

in comfort forever. However, I know people who don't like that seat at all.

If I had to design the perfect kayak seat, it would be like a dentist chair. It would cradle your entire body from the mid-back to your heels - giving full support along the entire body. With that concept in mind, you can see that the discomfort lies in the areas that don't get supported or... where the support ends and the body makes the transition in to free space. Many times the pinching of nerves is at that point

Unfortunately, many kayak seats are tested and accepted by the designer along with a few helpers who value their job and that's the one that goes on every kayak. This person might weigh 260 lbs. with absolutely nothing similar to your anatomy. You'll have the choice of adaptation of your body or the seat. In all probability, a bit of both will probably occur.

Generally, the lower a kayak's volume is, the more of a challenge it will be to maintain comfort unless you're flexible. Having the legs bent is just more comfortable than being straight legged especially considering that you have to use your upper torso muscles in unison with the legs while in this position.

Most boat builders carve their own seats out of closed cell foam. I've seen everything from a gentle uphill curve to full tractor type of seats with hip pads and more. Through some experimentation and experience, most builders are able to make something that feels pretty good. I've been using a fiberglass seat that I make from a mold that's a close copy of the Valley Canoe seat for my wood boats.

A few things that I learned may be of comfort to you. I find that a seat should have an uphill angle. In my case fairly steep (I learned this from my P & H Serius seat which is the most comfortable one for me). This slant is the same angle that your thighs travel when in the paddling position. I think that the longer the seat is the better. In other words, the more your body is cradled and supported, the less pressure is on any one area. Many people experience leg discomfort because they are in a seating position that puts a lot of pressure on their lower bottom which cuts off the blood supply to the legs and possibly pinches the nerves. If you sit on a hardwood floor in a kayaking position, it will be obvious to you where the discomfort emanates.

Padding a plastic kayak seat so that the legs travel a bit more up hill can sometimes relieve discomfort. I've seen those (half-assed) tiny British seats where the owner extended the seat with

foam and increased their comfort by adding more supported area for their thighs, thus relieving pressure on their bottom. Sometimes a little padding under the front of a seat to angle it more can add a lot of comfort.

People who have larger thighs don't seem to like the uphill tractor seats as much as me. I think they get pinched at the end of the seat whereas a leaner thigh person is not bothered by this. Maybe the angle is just too steep for their personal fit.

Some people just purchase a seat pad and add it to their stock kayak seat to alleviate any slight discomfort they are experiencing. Although, if you raise your body height too much, you'll compromise your initial stability.

Another often overlooked detail in the paddling comfort acquisition is the seat to foot brace length. Generally, the more vertical your foot position is, the more likely you are to get cramping. Once again, flexibility comes in to play here. If you're occasionally experiencing discomfort, push your foot pegs a notch forward and you'll immediately get relief. I find that I'm a notch forward in the winter, probably because of all the clothing build up. When I started the cold paddling season, I was noticeably tighter in the boat and less comfortable in my legs.

Some boat builders who make a foam padded bulkhead for their feet leave an opening in the middle so they can occasionally stretch a foot if they need to. The shape is like an upside down horseshoe for the padding. Very often all that's needed is an occasional few seconds of foot stretch to maintain comfort and keep the blood flowing.

As they say, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it". If your anatomy agrees with your boat and you can paddle for long periods in total comfort, consider yourself lucky or gifted. (or maybe that discomfort portion of the brain has finally gone) But if you're new to paddling or adapting to a newly acquired boat, a little experimenting and some patience will yield results. Many paddlers go through this and sometimes with no mechanical intervention, we are suddenly paddling in total comfort again. Could it be because our body adapts to the new seating position or maybe it's because it's spring again, the sun is shining and there's no better place to be sitting than in our own kayak.



A DISTORTED N.Y. TIMES ARTICLE

If you've been reading the ConnYak bulletin board, you have seen reference to the NY Times article that ran on 11-24-05 titled "Island Plea: No Gawking, Please" by C. J. Hughes. I would like to meet C. J. Hughes. He did an excellent job on fueling a smoldering fire of concern between the Stony Creek residents and kayakers. I don't know where he got the impetus to do this article, but obviously he was in touch with a lot of frustrated islanders and Stony Creek residents who don't enjoy the overcrowding they are experiencing.

If you analyze the article, there are only two actual statements of fact.

1. Lorrie Adams (who's picture is in the article) said that she has seen kayakers on her island.
2. The Police have never made an arrest for trespassing or vandalism on the islands.

Everything else is opinion and rumor. Unfortunately, as we all know, opinion and negativity has an effect on the reader and people are left with an undesirable feeling about kayakers especially coming from a publication that many people soak up like the sun.

Here's a few ridiculous pieces.

"But trespassing by kayakers has become a major complaint, with some stories so extreme they seem absurd. There is the one about the woman who found a kayaker peeking into her outdoor shower. Or, the one about finding a kayaker actually in the shower. Or, in an ultimate Goldilocks moment, discovering an entire family enjoying a meal on the deck."

"On a warm sunny weekend day, it's not uncommon to see 100 of the brightly colored boats darting through the waves".

The efforts of the "Friends of Outer Island" has also been criticized for opening it up to kayakers and thus contributing to this *horrible* problem.

There have been weekends where I have paddled the Thimbles in the summer and have seen about 4 kayaks - some of them islanders. Paul Donoski who monitors Outer Island along with a few others, has never seen more than a 10 at once and that includes Chris's tour group.

What we're seeing here is the typical frustration that people experience as

EVENTS



CONNAYAK MEETING

Wednesday, Jan 15 - 6:30
WALLINGFORD PARK AND RECREATION
(ALL MEETINGS ARE NOW AT 6:30)

"Paddling Alaska"

Slide show and talk by Wayne Smith.

Also: Elections - and General Issues

WINTER POOL SESSIONS

Every Sunday in Jan. and the first two in Feb. 9 am - 1 pm at the Wallingford High School Pool. Be there at 9 if you need help with your boat or arrive when you want since we take turns in the pool. Practice rolls, rescues, paddle float - anything you want. Fee \$10 - Bring a check made to ConnYak or cash in an envelope with your name on it. Wear a Farmer John or other apparel if you have it. Although it's a heated pool, it's easy to get chilled once wet and hanging around.

Directions: Rt. 91, Exit 15 . Rt 68 W. Go past intersections of Rt 15 & Rt 150. Take fourth left on to Hope Hill Road which is at the light. Sheehan High School is 1/4 mile on the Rt.

their private oasis is exposed to population growth, expanded tourism as well as the increase of paddle sports.

"You can't move around at all" said Edward Cooke, Treasurer of the Stony Creek Boating Assoc. referring to both the waterways and roads. It's a zoo and getting worse every year."

It's an old story, but much of the parking problem is because of the increased popularity of the tourist attractions that bring in people who just happen to drive cars.

I'm happy that we have done some homework on the new paddlers issue with our campaign. I just hope the stores will give them out.

And, I know that people have landed on private property just like the children who slide down the hill in my back yard in the snow with out permission. Much of how we react to things is often a reflection of who we really are.

There's copies of the article circulating around the club if you want to read it.

-JB

CLASSIFIED

Dry-tops. Stohlquist. One new, one used. \$100 & \$65. Both mens medium. Tom 413-593-6167.

Old Town Castine Kayak 14' beginners kayak. red, 2 hatches, paddle and skirt. \$600. 860-985-6893

Valley Skerray, Fiberglass, Blue over White, with skeg and Chimp Pump. Great condition! \$1700 203-854-9713 brianenichols@aol.com

Valley Skerray XL, Fiberglass, Turquoise over white, with skeg, two hatches, chimp pump, and compass. \$1795. Contact (203) 840-0156.

Aquaterra Double - Gemini, poly, tandem, wide beam, great for the kids or lake. Asking \$600.00 or best offer. Call 860-388-2464 Sharon.

Old Town Nantucket - 1 year old - \$500.00 yellow poly, rudder, thigh braces, adjustable hip pads Pete 860-749-0471

Impex Montauk, Fiberglass, \$1800 includes Skirt and compass. Call Bill - 860-535-4473

NORDKAPP HM good condition. Day hatch, rear oval hatch, canvas storage bag, compass. Orang / white \$1600 860-633 7254.

North Shore Freewater Trek fiberglass sea kayak. 16 ft 22 in, 45 lbs. Great for small to medium paddler. \$1000. (203) 853-2909 or email sryan@lww.com.

16'x 22" Yellow/White Dagger 'Meridian SK' f/g kayak with skeg, 2 hatches, Nexus Type 85 Compass, spray skirt, f/g paddle, Milford, CT 1850 203.877.8493 'clayluce@hotmail.com'

Two Werner paddles for sale; one left hand control San Juan and one right hand control Camano . Both in Fiberglass . \$175.00 each . Call 203 226 9674 days or 203 454 2278 eves .

Wilderness Systems Shenai, Red over white, Kevlar. Very light, fast boat. \$1400.00. Phone 203-270-9134

Perception Pirouette White Water kayak: Float bags, \$450 B/O. 860-613-0622 or Bkahuna@snet.net

VCP Nordkapp HMC Golden Yellow deck/White hull, oval stern hatch, \$1000.00 also Dagger Outburst Surf/playboat, red, bow & stern airbags, \$700.00. Call Don 860-643-1609, Email:nordkappdg@aol.com.

GPS -Garmin eTrex Vista (eTrex best model) 24MB open memory, barometric altimeter, electroic compass, basemap with Nav Aids. incl. instruction video. \$300. (203) 265-0169 lathrop@cttel.net

Necky Kayook single kayak with spray skirt and paddle. Neoprene hatch covers . \$450.00 203-544-0555 ext.15

Dagger Animis white water kayak. Great beginner boat. \$350.00 \$450.00 203-544-0555 ext.15

Tandem wooden kayak. 18 feet long. \$750.00 \$450.00 203-544-0555 ext.15

TO JOIN CONNYAK...

ConnYak is a non profit club that is open to all paddlers interested in sea kayaking from any location. ConnYak annual membership fee is \$15.

Membership includes monthly newsletter, paddles, functions, etc.

Send inquiries to:

ConnYak, P.O. Box 197, Ellington, CT 06029

E-MAIL: CONNYAK@CONNYAK.ORG

WEBSITE / BULLETIN BOARD: WWW.CONNYAK.ORG

T-shirts for Articles

Authors of articles for the newsletter get a free T-shirt. If you have written an article and haven't recieved you T-shirt, please speak up at one of the paddles. The club officers usually have them at the paddles.

Check the bulletin board fo impromptu trips listed by members - www.connyak.org

Send newsletter articles or classifieds to:

Jay Babina e-mail: jbabina@snet.net

7 Jeffrey Lane, Branford, CT 06405

203-481-3221 Fax 203-481-1136

**Please contact the Newsletter
when items are sold.**



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