

## It's Inuit int. it?

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In Britain the older canoeing textbooks declared that canoes were descended from the Eskimo kayak and Canadian canoes from the birchbark of the Red Indian.

"Eskimo" and "Red Indian" are no longer acceptable titles for the aboriginal inhabitants of the Americas. Nowadays we refer to the "Inuit" and "Native Americans". Decked craft propelled with double bladed paddles are called kayaks while open craft used with single blades are canoes. Canadian canoes were actually developed from dugouts, but that is another story.

When I started paddling on the sea, in 1950, very few of the decked boats looked remotely like Inuit craft. Yet, in Britain most of our modern sea kayaks show obvious Greenland Inuit ancestry. How did this change come about?

Recreational sea paddling is well established in my homeland of Scotland. It has been on the go for at least one hundred and thirty years. For example, a couple of years ago my local newspaper copied for me a report from their columns of a hundred years ago. It told of a lecture given by Mr John Ross Brown, a surgeon dentist from Greenock, who over a period of ten years had canoed round Scotland, from the Eden to the Tyne and covered some 3,500 miles in the process.

In the early days the sport was confined to the well to do. They could afford to approach a boat -builder, with a reputation for building good quality light craft and have a canoe built to their own specification. Competitive rowing was already well established as were the specialised boat building skills it gave rise to. Thus early British recreational canoes tended to follow these proven building methods using very thin clinker (overlapping) planking, generally of oak for hard wear but sometimes, if lightness was paramount, of cedar.

In the 1920's and 30's folding canoes became more widely available, at first from the continent, although not many tradesmen could aspire to own one of these exotic craft. Some commercially produced rigid designs also appeared, to cater for the less expensive end of the market, enabling wider participation in sea paddling. However, neither type bore much more resemblance to the Inuit kayak than their clinker built predecessors, save that they were "skin" covered. It has to be said that some of the continental manufacturers of folding canoes were producing Greenland style kayaks in the 1930's. For example the popular "Kajak mit der Flosse" (kayak with the fin), a model produced by Otto Hartel at his "Grazer Boote" factory in the city of Graz by the river Mur in Austria. This kayak was 17 feet 4 inches long and 20 inches wide but it never caught on, on this side of the Channel.

After the deprivations of the 1939 to 45 war it was quite some time before sufficient suitable materials became available to permit manufacturing to get under way again. Generally the craft produced were to the same or similar designs as pre war. However, in this land fit for heroes there was an upsurge in interest in outdoor activities. In response, designs appeared which were suitable for home construction by amateurs from the basic immediate post materials. The "Loch Lomond" from the Scottish Hosteller's Canoe club was one such and the first that I have found which was specifically designed for sea touring. Percy Blandford's series was also conceived at this time, his "PBK 15" becoming popular with sea paddlers. Still there was nothing very kayak like.

Reverting to the early 1930's, a figure deeply involved with East Greenland kayaks was Gino Watkins. He is justly famous for his expeditions, receiving medals from the Geographic Societies of three nations. His 1932 undertaking to Greenland was to survey, on behalf of Pan American Airways, for a suitable location to refuel aircraft on a proposed great circle route between Europe and North America. He and others of this and his previous Greenland expedition, learned kayaking skills from the natives of Angmagssalik. The legendary Greenlander Manesse Mathaeussen, who was a leading figure in the re-establishment of traditional kayaking on the West Coast of Greenland in the 1980's, is reputed to have been the one who taught Gino to roll. Financial limitations dictated a certain amount of living off the land and Gino took to hunting by kayak. His untimely death while so occupied has been the subject of much speculation and what actually happened will never be known. However, one offshoot of his activities in Greenland, is the existence in Britain of a number of kayaks built for or obtained by expedition members.

From John Brand's research it appears that one of the kayaks built for expedition member Fred Spencer Chapman and which was subsequently lost back in Greenland, was replicated by three people, Messrs. Moore, Ellis and Keevil. Oliver Cock, the first National Coach of the British Canoe Union, borrowed Ellis's replica and christened it the "Red Spear". Being much impressed with the craft he approached Ken Littlelycke, who had developed the boat building method now universally known as "stitch and glue", to replicate the kayak in plywood. Ken produced a modified design, to be more accommodating to paddlers of larger stature, around 1961. It was marketed under the title "Kayel Angmagssalik" and was available for a number of years in kit form or as plans for home building. Despite being used by Geoff Hunter in 1970 for his 2,000 mile epic paddle round a large part of the British coast and a fair number being built, it never became a popular craft for sea paddling, perhaps due to its limited capacity and narrow beam.

Frank Sutton came to Britain from Austria in 1937. Then known as Franz Shulhof he brought with him an Inuit kayak and one of Otto Hartel's "Kajaks" mit der Flosse". He is credited with developing the Put-Across roll and being the first to teach the skill of rolling in Britain. Having said that, John Brand records rolling being taught at Cambridge in the early 1930's. John Sakehouse a Greenland Inuit and an accomplished artist gave a demonstration of kayaking skills including rolling and harpooning in Leith harbour in 1816, I sometimes wonder if he passed on any of his rolling skills to his hosts. Frank's teaching led, in 1938, to the formation of the British Canoe Union Rolling Circus which gave demonstrations in various places in the south of the country.

Another paddler had arrived from the continent a little earlier in the shape of David Hirshfeld, from Germany. He established Tyne Canoes in 1935 to build folding craft. In addition to his usual range David supplied sectional Greenland style kayaks to the Rolling Circus. He built folding and rigid versions of the design and subsequently produced plans for amateur construction. It would appear to me, that the "Tyne Eskimo Kayak" was based on an actual West Greenland example. Perhaps the investigations by Tony Ford of the Historic Canoe & Kayak Association into the history of Tyne Folding Boats Ltd., will turn up the details. This design was certainly used for sea paddling by David and his contemporaries right into the 1960's, but again lack of carrying capacity restricted its use for touring. This and its lack of stability compared to other touring designs of the day prevented it becoming popular with sea paddlers.

However, Joe Reid, a member of the Scottish Hosteller's Canoe Club, who had been sea paddling, building kayaks and other craft since before World War II based his "Clyde Single" of the late 50's on the Tyne Kayak. The Clyde was a canvas covered rigid kayak 16' 3" long by 25" wide. It proved popular with Scottish sea-touring paddlers and was produced commercially, as complete craft, kits and plans for home construction. A "Clyde Double" with twin cockpits soon followed and Hamish and Anne Gow used a version with a plywood hull for their epic crossing to St Kilda in 1965. At last, here was a recreational sea-touring kayak, which began to look like it had Inuit origins. However production of these designs did not survive into the fiberglass era.

A group of paddlers from the Northeast of England became active in sea paddling in the late 1950's. They included such people as Alan Bye, Chris Hare, John Robson and Peter Lofthouse who were to become well known in sea paddling circles. Alan became a B.C.U. Senior Coach. In 1963 a canny lad by the name of Derek Hutchinson attended one of his weekend courses. Smitten by Alan's enthusiasm Derek took to sea paddling with his renowned energy. Although he had started his paddling career in 1961 with a stubby canvas covered "P11K 10", his first sea kayak was, I am informed, a "Wessex Sea Rapier" built by G.L.Gmach, (pronounced Mac), a Hungarian living in the south of England. This craft is reputed to have been the first glassfibre sea kayak commercially produced in the UK. The shape came originally from the drawing board of a prolific Norwegian designer, by the name of Hoel, in 1942 and was then called the "Seaway". It was an excellent sea boat but bore no resemblance to a Greenland kayak. Subsequently Gmach changed the name of the "Sea Rapier" to "Norseman" for commercial reasons. Derek tells me that in 1967 when he produced the first design of his own he based it on a picture of a kayak from the Mackenzie Delta. However, I have no doubt he also drew on his experiences with his first sea boat.

Harald Drever, an Orkney man and a professor at St Andrews University, had a long association with the village of Igdlorssuit on the small island of Ubkendt, about 180 miles north of Qasigiannuit (Christianshaab) in West Greenland. During the summer of 1957 or 1958 while on holiday in the North West of Scotland he met a young student of the University of Glasgow, one Kenneth Taylor. Ken, a member of the Scottish Hosteller's Canoe Club was on a paddling trip at the time and was soon persuaded, by Drever, to undertake a one man expedition to Igdlorssuit to study the kayak and its place in Inuit culture.

While at Igdlorssuit, in 1959, Ken had a sealskin-covered kayak built to fit him by the local builder, Emanuele Kornielson, then fifty years of age. He was also to have a kayak built for John D Heath, the well-known American expert on Inuit kayaks and paddling techniques. Unfortunately, there was a shortage of seals that year so John had to make do with an uncovered frame. John is no longer with us but I believe the kayak frame is still in Texas, with his widow Jessie.

On his return to Scotland Ken gave a slide show and rolling demonstration to his fellow club members at Rowardennan on Loch Lomond. A number of them tried out the kayak, those who could get into it, and they were impressed with its handling. I can vouch personally that if you are not used to donning a cold, wet, Tuilik, or kayaking jacket, made from raw sealskin it is quite an experience, especially for the olfactory senses. The kayak was such a joy to handle that I took photographs of it which were enlarged and used to produce a drawing which was to become number one in the Canoeing Magazine's Project Eskimo series. This drawing was also used as the basis for a plywood hulled sea touring kayak built in 1961 and adopted by the Magazine's plans service, it was subsequently named "Kempock" after the promontory on which my home town stands. Being of the age when the fair sex was beginning to feature in my life a canvas covered double version soon followed which was called the "Cloch" after another headland on the Firth of Clyde, it also became part of Canoeing Magazine's plans service.

A young Glasgow lad, John Reid, decided he would like a "Kempock" but being of generous proportions he built a larger, canvas-covered version. He set off from Morar on the West Coast of Scotland for a solo trip on the 22nd of March 1972. Big John's trip was to last until the 10th June when he paddled into Lerwick Harbour in Shetland, a truly memorable trip. I did not meet John until 1994 when we were both in Shetland for the annual Papa Stour event hosted by Shetland Canoe Club. John, now long resident in France extending the Auld Alliance, had not been back in Shetland since 1972 and was still paddling "Manannan" his big canvas "Kempock". Both "Kempock" and "Cloch" proved to be good sea boats and were built at home and abroad from the Americas to New Zealand in canvas, plywood and glassfibre versions but never commercially, at least as far as I know.

Drever was keen to follow up on Ken's trip and Alan Bye was approached to assemble and lead a group of paddlers to continue the work. In the event only one of them, Chris Hare, was able to make the trip to Igdlorssuit in 1966. He also had a kayak built for him there, which he brought back to the UK. In the late 1960's Chris, Johnny Gorman and Eddie Frost, all from the North East of England, formed Northern kayaks and in the early 1970's produced the "Lindisfarne". Designed by Eddie, who had a marine engineering background, it was based on Chris's kayak but incorporated a number of features not of Inuit origin. Most obvious of which was a large breakwater on the fore deck. However, it was not to be the first commercially built kayak to have a Greenlandic background. Two other models followed, one with a larger volume and a much lower chine line, more reminiscent of EastGreenland kayaks, the other was a round bilge design.

Ken Taylor moved to the United States of America in 1964 to further his studies and left his kayak in the care of my paddling partner Joe Reid, previously mentioned for his "Clyde" designs. With the kayak to hand Joe and I carefully measured it and I produced another drawing which was, of course, much more accurate than the one scaled up from photographs.

Joe built a canvas covered semi-replica a couple of inches wider with a slightly raised fore deck and enlarged cockpit. It was a beautiful boat but he considered the upturned ends only produced spray, so cut them down. Andrew Carnduff, from Irvine Canoe Club, lifted templates from the hull of Joe's semi-replica and built a copy in plywood, using the Kayel method. Unfortunately, he did not realise the importance of using a temporary midship frame so the boat lost rocker and had a flatter bottom section than intended. He called his boat the "Skua".

This first "Skua" was sold to John Flett of Aberdeen who copied it in glassfibre. Numbers were built at courses run by various education authorities in Scotland and used mainly in conjunction with the Coaching Scheme. Much later they were produced commercially for a short time, with bulkheads, hatches and a modified gunwale jointing system under the name "Griffin".

My new drawing of Ken Taylor's kayak was and still is, made freely available to anyone interested and has been used as the basis for a number of successful kayak designs, some very traditional and some with radically altered decks but all with the basic Igdlorssuit hull. The first of these was the "Gantock Single" followed by the "Gantock Double". Neither were produced commercially but were built in many countries, as designed and in stretched or shrunk versions in plywood and glassfibre. However, none of the designs based on Ken's kayak, mentioned so far could be said to have had any great impact on the modern sea paddling scene.

In the 1960's a revolution was taking place in paddling in the U.K. A number of factors contributed to this. In education, outdoor activities were being incorporated into the curriculum, introducing young people into the sport. Along with this the B.C.U. Coaching Scheme was gaining acceptance U.K. wide, training even more paddlers. Working people were enjoying a better standard of living. Many were no longer satisfied with watching the local football team on a Saturday afternoon. They wanted to do something more exciting, more satisfying and to be doing it themselves. The increase in numbers of participants coincided with the appearance of a new material, glassfibre, which enabled quality craft to be produced in quantity, for the first time at affordable prices.

The resulting explosion in numbers placed a great strain on the rivers, particularly in England, at which the B.C.U. Coaching Scheme directed those whom it trained. Faced with this a lot of people turned to the sea for their paddling but found that there was a distinct lack of

commercially available kayaks suitable for the purpose.

My canoeing career has not been confined to sea paddling, indeed in the early 1960's for a time I was the Slalom Secretary of Scottish Canoe Association. At one or two slaloms on the Tay I had noticed a lad from the Deep South called Geoff Blackford. I met him again at one of the early National Canoe Conferences. At Bury or Crystal Palace, I can't remember which. He was standing beside the pool having a discussion with someone about Inuit kayaks. Naturally, I offered to send him a copy of my drawing of Ken's Taylor's boat.

Geoff lengthened the hull by about ten inches, raised the fore deck, enlarged the cockpit slightly, built it in plywood and called the result the "Anas Acuta". His boat was a great success and appreciated by all who paddled her. Two of those became more involved. First, Carl Quaife asked if he could take a mould off the boat to enable glassfibre copies to be made. Then Alan Byde did considerable additional work on the mould.

Frank Goodman, was then a builder of successful river kayaks. The "Soar Valley Special" springs to mind hence his company name, Valley Canoe Products. He has told me that he had been approached to build a sea kayak but that a suitable design had not been available and that at that time he knew nothing about sea canoeing. However, shortly afterwards he came to an agreement with Geoff, Carl and Alan to build the "Anas Acuta" under licence from them. Thus, in 1972 the first commercially produced fibreglass sea kayak in Britain with Greenlandic roots that I am aware of, appeared on the paddling scene.

The similarity between the hulls of the "Anas Acuta" and the first "Lindisfarne" design has been commented on by a number of people. However, I have discovered that Chris Hare's Inuit kayak had been built in Igdlorssuit by Jakob Korn Nielsen, the son of Emanuele, referred to above. It would be strange if the boats did not show a certain family likeness.

At what point Frank Goodman started sea paddling I do not know, but it must have been soon after taking up the licence for the "Anas". As the December 1973 issue of Canoeing in Britain magazine showed him in the cover picture, in company with three other paddlers on the island of Tarnsay, off Harris in the Outer Hebrides, each with an "Anas Acuta". It is reasonable to assume that Frank drew on his experience with the "Anas" when he came to design later sea kayaks at Valley.

Although I have been interested for a long time in the history of canoeing, particularly on the sea, I have done very little actual research on the subject. Rather than seek out information it seems to gravitate to me and stick. The data for this article has come from a variety of sources, books, magazines, personal involvement and conversations over many years. It may well be that you can add to or correct some aspect of the foregoing, if so I would be grateful if you would contact me. I feel that it is important to record the history of our sport and that every effort should be made to get it correct. It is very easy to mislead, albeit unintentionally, and an error repeated often enough readily becomes accepted as fact.

Finally, I know that I may be accused of being biased with regard to Ken Taylor's kayak. It's true, I am. However, I would submit that this particular Greenland Inuit kayak has had a greater impact on the development of the modern recreational sea kayak in the United Kingdom than any other and for that we owe a debt of gratitude to Emanuele Korn Nielsen of Igdlorssuit. What other Inuit kayak can claim to be the basis, directly or indirectly, for over thirty different modern designs and more in the pipeline. For introducing one of the countries leading sea kayak manufacturers to sea canoeing and for being the basis for arguably the most successful commercially produced glassfibre semi-replica Greenland kayak in existence?

Of which it can definitely be said, in my best West of Scotland vernacular, --- Its Inuit int. it? (Its Inuit isn't it?).

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