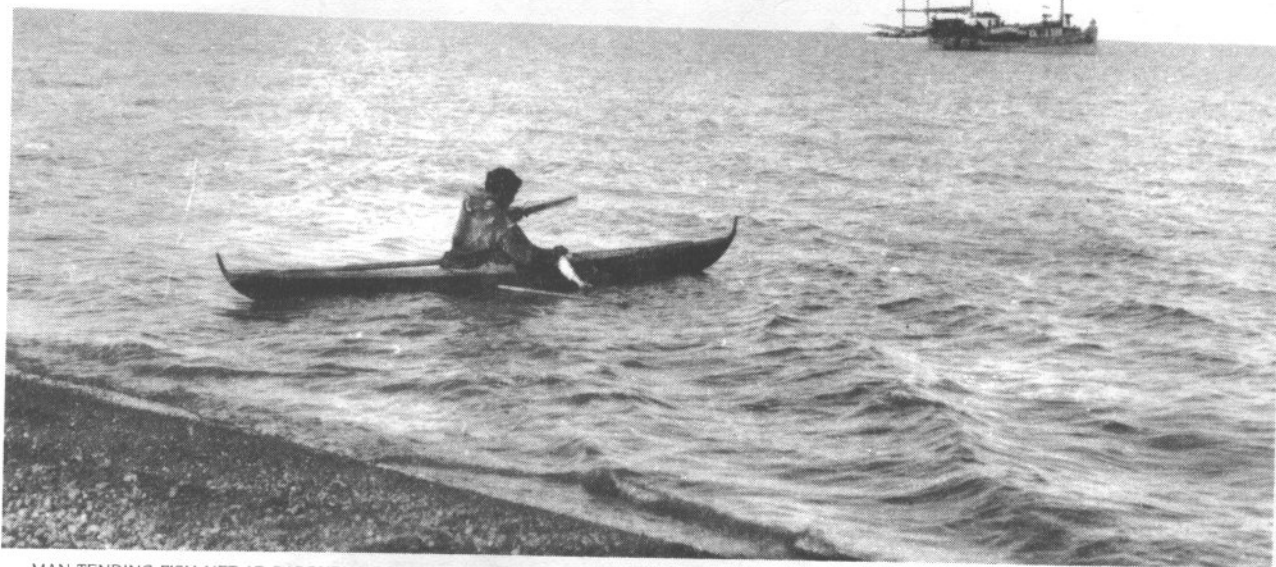


THE MACKENZIE ESKIMO KAYAK



COURTESY NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF CANADA

MAN TENDING FISH NET AT OAPOUENA POINT, N.W.T. THE CANADIAN ARCTIC EXPEDITION SUPPLY SHIPS ALASKA AND NORTH STAR ARE IN THE BACKGROUND. PHOTO BY DIAMOND JENNESS TAKEN 19 AUGUST 1914.

BY DAVID ZIMMERLY

THE MACKENZIE DELTA area near the Alaska/Canada border is filled with myriad twisting channels and marshes. At one time it was home to Canada's largest population of Inuit. The whalers came in, diseases were inadvertently introduced, and by the early 1900s the Mackenzie Eskimo were culturally extinct.

In their heyday they were known as great beluga whale hunting kayakers who made one of the most interesting and most carefully constructed kayaks found anywhere in the Arctic.

Today only five Mackenzie Eskimo kayaks remain in museum collections. One (DNMP31:64) was collected for the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen by the famous Danish explorer Knud Rasmussen in 1924. It was said to be the last kayak to be found in the Mackenzie area. National Museum of Canada Ethnologist Diamond Jenness collected two small Mackenzie

Eskimo kayaks (IV-D-1058 and IV-D-2002) during the 1913-16 Canadian Arctic Expedition. Adney and Chappelle illustrated one from the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation (1964:201, *fig.* 188).

I once collected a Mackenzie Eskimo kayak through an art dealer. It was in excellent condition and was said to have hung for years on the wall of an English castle. It must have been collected around the turn of the century although no collection data came with it. Of the five extant Mackenzie kayaks, this one best represents the type and is the one illustrated in this article.

MACKENZIE KAYAK PREHISTORY

The Mackenzie Eskimo kayak is known archaeologically to be at least 500 years old. It has characteristics more like those from Alaska's Seward Peninsula in Alaska than any neighboring Eskimo groups. It

appears likely that at some point these people migrated to the Mackenzie Delta area from Alaska.

KAYAK CONSTRUCTION

The 16' 5" Mackenzie Eskimo kayak of Figure 1 is decked, full-ended, narrow-beamed (19"), rounded, multichined and covered with sealskin. It has a straight bottom and rising bow and stern that terminate in two vertical horns. There is little sheer except for a slight amount near the bow. Figure 2 shows the general construction and English names for the various parts.

The cockpit coaming is slightly raked and rests fore and aft on curved deck beams of somewhat heavier construction than the others. The coaming is of the floating type with the skin covering under it.

The deck is slightly ridged along its full length due to a high narrow deck stringer