



Building the One-Hole Aleut Bidarka

Part II

Assembling the puzzle

by David W. Zimmerly
photographs by the author

vas skin will effect the final shape of the kayak. The Aleut design of the pieces keeps weight low without sacrificing strength. As before, all dimensions are given in centimeters except where otherwise indicated.

— Editors

Admired all those pieces long enough? Now it's time to lash them together. Two sawhorses make a fine assembly platform, but even an apartment floor will serve. The basic procedure is to join the gunwales to the deck beams and end

Few boats are as clean-lined or handsome as the Aleut bidarka. Yet they are not difficult to lash together.

blocks, and fit in the stern piece and the upper bow piece, followed by the deck stringers. Then, the deck framework is turned upside down and the lower bow piece/keelson is fitted along with the other two lengths of keelson. Next the ribs are bent, fit in place, and faired by "rack of eye." Finally the stringers are attached, then the cockpit coaming and stanchions, and lastly the mast step. That's the overview, now for the details.

Place the matched gunwales on the sawhorses and fit two middle (longest) deck beams. The gunwales will flare, as in figure 1. Tie them together with a temporary lashing as shown in photograph A. Then, working towards the ends, fit in the rest of the deck beams, except for the small round ones at the bow and stern. When you're satisfied that everything is symmetrical

Lean and fast, light and tippy, the Aleut bidarkas were high-performance hunting machines. Aleut hunters would venture as far as fifteen miles off shore in them for as long as eighteen hours at a time. Although not for everyone, these kayaks are too good to be relegated to museums.

Last issue (SBJ #29), ethnologist David Zimmerly described shaping each of the seventy-eight individual pieces that make up the bidarka's frame, using modern tools and materials. Here he tells us how to put them together, using traditional arctic joining techniques, and how to cover the boat. The articles are based on the author's reconstruction of a two-hole bidarka (from the Smithsonian's collection) and on his examination of the outstanding one-hole frame in UCLA's Lowie Museum. The Lowie frame is shown here in drawings and photographs.

Remember, only the wood that eventually comes in contact with the can-