

HISTORY

two or three on the other" (1953:48). He also reported that capsizing recovery with the single-bladed paddle was possible in the one-hole kayak.

Bering Sea Paddles

The Bering Sea people (Bristol Bay, Nunivak Island, the Kuskokwim/Yukon Delta region and Norton Sound) used double-bladed paddles for speed and singles for normal use. After the introduction of rifles, the kayaks became beamier for greater stability and the use of the double-bladed paddle went almost out of existence. I saw none in use in the Bering Sea area in the mid-1970s.

The single-bladed paddles average about 5' (154.1 cm) in overall length with blades less than half the total paddle length and a "T" grip put on with a mortise and tenon joint. Painting of shaft and blade was common.

Paddling technique was simply two strokes per side with no twisting or turning of the shaft as in a "J" stroke. Capsizing recovery via single-bladed paddle is reported, but no informants I talked to could do it or had seen it performed.

blade edge. The shaft has a round cross-section. The blade is 1/4" (0.6 cm) thick at a distance of 3/16" (0.5 cm) from the edge. The grip ends are 1" (2.6 cm) diameter with the diameter measuring 1 1/2" (3.7 cm) in the middle. The blade is painted blue with the shaft and grip green. Kayak builder Dick Bunyan told me that the correct paddle length for Hooper Bay kayakers is an armspan (the original measure for a fathom) with the ends gripped in the second finger-joints.

Bering Strait Paddles

Bering Strait paddles exhibit the greatest variability of any group discussed. There are few examples of double-bladed paddles. The singles have long symmetric blades with the handgrips often carved rather than mortised on.

The King Island variety of Bering Strait paddles has the most elaborate painted decorations on the blades. The paint was usually black and red. Some of these paddles are further decorated with grooves carved up the side starting where the blade joins the loom. Paddle length was determined exactly the same as in Hooper Bay. The loom was elliptical in cross-section with the maximum diameter perpendicular to the plane of the blade. Two strokes on each side paddled the kayak in a straight course.

According to John Heath's informants (1972:26), the double-bladed paddle (*pautik*) was one and one-half armspans long with blades about 20" (50.8 cm) long by 4" (10.2 cm) wide. The loom was elliptical.

North Alaska Paddles

Paddles of North Alaska are all double-bladed with short blades that may or may not be symmetric. Usually they were ridged on at least one side. Red and black paint on blades, shaft or both was not uncommon.

Figure 7 is of a typical North Alaska double-bladed paddle. It is in the collections of the University Museum at the University of Pennsylvania. Unfortunately there is no date or provenience listed, but it was associated with a short kayak of the type used for retrieving seals shot from the floe edge. The black-painted blades are ridged on one side only. The shaft has an elliptical cross-section.

Figure 6: Hooper Bay, Alaska kayak paddle made by Dick Bunyan; measurements in cm.

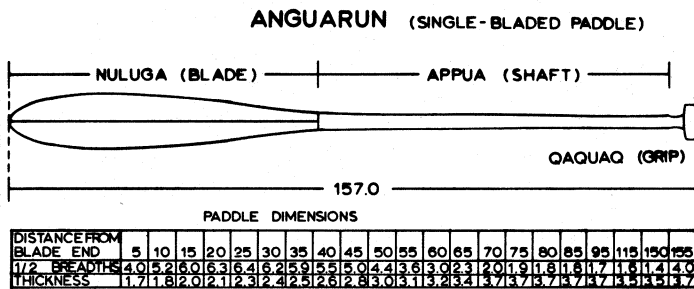


Figure 6 is a single-bladed paddle made in Hooper Bay, Alaska, and now in the collections of the National Museum of Man in Ottawa. The blade is ridged symmetrically on both sides with the blade cross-section concave from the ridge to the

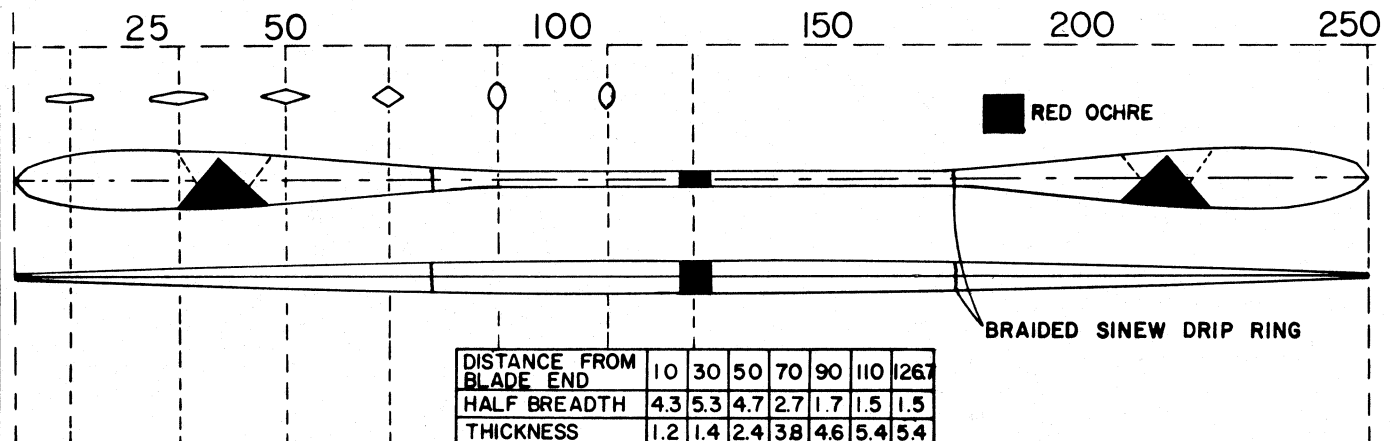


Figure 8: Mackenzie Eskimo paddle; measurements in cm.