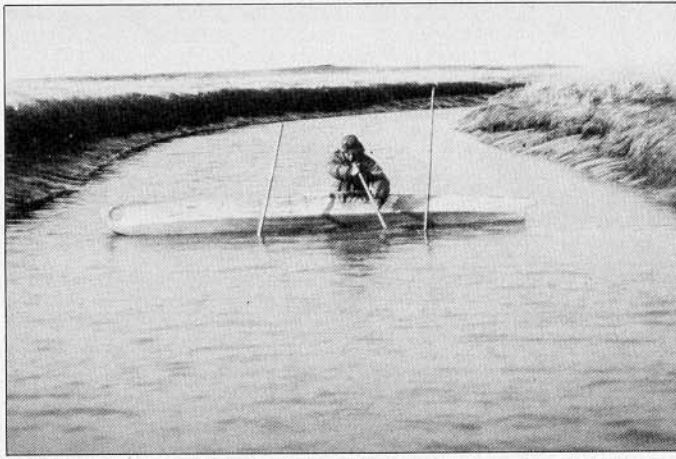


After rigging a net stretched between two poles, Aloysius Hale uses his paddle to drive tomcod downstream into the net.



the parka, to prevent chafe due to constant rubbing on the cockpit coaming while paddling. The parka was sealed tightly around the face with a drawstring, and fish-skin mitts with sealskin palms had long cuffs that were tied tightly over the parka sleeves. Thus equipped, a paddler could capsize and remain dry except for his face. Though the ability to right oneself after a capsize was reported for this area, Hooper

Bay informants could not remember this as being possible or important.

Bearded seal stomachs with a fine mesh grass covering were carried as a type of canteen. In rough seas these could be emptied, inflated with air, and shoved in the kayak ends to act as extra buoyancy chambers should the kayak fill with water. Also inside the kayak was a wooden slat seat on top of a woven grass mat. Both helped keep dirt

from working down between stringers and cover, where it could chafe through. Another grass mat was carried inside to be used as a windbreak when butchering game on an ice floe. It could also be used as a sail when two kayaks were tied together. A kayak sled was put crosswise over the foredecks and the mat secured to it in front.

Because the kayaks of this area became so broad and deep, use of the double-bladed paddle was difficult, and consequently it was used only for speed—often from a kneeling position. Kneeling, and occasionally standing, were paddling positions used with the single-bladed paddle as well. A short single paddle was used to scull the kayak to within harpooning distance of sea mammals. It could be noiselessly operated with one hand on the side away from a dozing animal, with a weapon held at the ready in the other.

Other than serving as a sea mammal hunting tool, the kayak was used for spearing waterfowl, fishing, racing, gathering firewood, occasional clamming by the women, transporting goods,

Building a Sea Kayak—An Ancient Ritual

Their construction takes place with ceremony in the men's house, usually under the supervision of some old man well skilled in boat-making. The men measure and cut each individual part of the wooden frame according to a prescribed system based on the length of various members of the body or a combination of such members. Thus each man's kaiak [kayak] is built according to the specifications of his own body and hence is peculiarly fitted to his use.... After each part is meticulously made according to measurement, the frame is put together with lashings of rawhide.... The workmanship must of necessity be fine, because no cutting with edged tools may be done once the parts are finished and are being joined....

The night after the lashing of the kaiak frames is completed, the women gather to cut sealskins to size for the coverings, three thick and heavy hair sealskins for the bottoms and the sides, and two spotted sealskins for the lighter decking. As they work, the women wear waterproof parkas, which are believed to prevent any evil influence from entering or afflicting the new kaiaks. After the cutting is finished, the women prepare food for the men.

The following day, while the women, dressed as before, are sewing together the skins, the kaiak owners sit before the bows of the completed frames and sing their hunting songs in an almost inaudible tone, since these songs are both sacred and secret. Kaiak owners often have their sons beside them to learn these chants, which descend from father to son.

After the singing, when the hides are nearly sewn, each wife brings to her husband a new wooden dish of fish or berries. Stripped to the waist, he throws a portion of the food to the floor as an offering, and prays for good luck during the coming hunting season. He then gives the food to the oldest man present (often the one who has supervised the kaiak-making), who distributes it to all the men at hand. The owner then walks once about the kaiak frame, pretending to carry a lighted lamp. Next he motions as if to shove a lamp under-

neath the bows, that seal may see and approach his kaiak as he hunts.

As the last flap, on the afterdeck, is sewn, after the frame is shoved into the completed covering, the now naked owner, accompanied by all the men present, sings his childbirth song to his new kaiak. The owner washes the cover with urine to remove any oil that may adhere to the surface, and rinses it in salt water. He then hauls his craft through the smoke-hole of the house and rests it in the snow, which will absorb dampness from its surface. Later he puts the kaiak on its rack and drapes over it his talismans, strung on belts, which are later to be kept in the kaiak. Here it remains a day and a night. Then at night he carries the craft to the ice where he sings his hunting songs, sacred only to him and to his family. Outside in the freezing weather the skin coverings bleach white. As soon as each new kaiak is finished, the owner performs his ceremony.

On returning to the men's house, the owner dresses in new parka and boots, and, grasping a bunch of long grass fibers, makes motions of sweeping toward the entrance. By this action he brushes outside any evil influence or contamination from his kaiak....

—Edward Curtis, from *The North American Indian*, vols. 12, 13, 14
Courtesy Johnson Reprint Corporation

