

the 1940s, and the kayak lost some of its functions. The skiff took the place of the umiak and usurped the kayak's seal-hunting functions during open-water season. Changes in kayak construction included the substitution of canvas for sealskin in covering the frame. Clenched nails at the rib/stringer junctures replaced traditional lashings. Except for the work of uncompromising craftsmen such as Dick Bunyan, the standards of workmanship have drastically declined.

Today the kayak is infrequently used for winter and early spring seal hunting when the skiff cannot easily maneuver among the ice. The kayak has become a tender to the skiff for other activities.

I accompanied Aloysius Hale by skiff to a section of Hooper Bay where nets were set to catch whitefish. The kayak was carried inside the skiff until we reached the fishing grounds, where it was put in the water carrying a gill net stored on the foredeck. The kayak was paddled to a nearby spot in the shallows, and the net was set by driving two end poles into the surf bottom. Aloysius returned to the skiff and came on board, leaving the kayak in the water. He scanned the area for seals for about 20 minutes, then returned to the net by kayak to check for fish. A number of other fishermen in the area were following the same procedure until a lone seal was sighted, sending the skiffs in pursuit at top speed. They surrounded the seal and took pot shots every time it surfaced. When it came up for air in a distant location, all skiffs raced away to

again surround the animal. Eventually the seal was killed, and, with the excitement over, everyone returned to the less exciting work of tending whitefish nets. Aloysius caught no fish that day.

One spring I again went out with Aloysius Hale—this time to the floe edge by snowmobile, pulling a sled with a kayak behind on a sled of its own. Aloysius hauled the sled right to the water's edge and arranged it, his paddle, and boathook for a quick launch into the water. He settled back against some rafted ice and scanned the area for seals, his scope-equipped rifle ready for use. Unfortunately we saw no seals; however, had Aloysius shot one from shore, he would have launched the kayak and rapidly paddled out to retrieve it before it sank.

Aloysius showed me another current use of the kayak. Traveling again by skiff with the kayak on board, we motored up a nearby slough (pronounced slew) little more than 30' to 40' wide. Off-loading the kayak (which held a net and other equipment), Aloysius paddled a short distance upstream, where he drove two poles into the muddy slough bottom. The net was tied between them. After paddling a hundred yards or so upstream, Aloysius slowly paddled back toward the net, all the while slapping the water with his single-blade paddle to drive the fish downstream into the net. When he reached the net he quickly pulled up the two poles and brought them together to close the net. The successful drive yielded a gunnysack full of tomcod that were dried for eating later in the winter.

Other than in the above limited uses, the kayak has ceased to function in any viable fashion. Many of the taboos and ceremonies surrounding the kayak were eliminated by the introduction of Christianity, and most of the craft's functions were supplanted by the motorized skiff. With the decline of the men's house (see sidebar), the ready sources of knowledge and help for kayak-building disappeared. The final reason for the decline of the kayak is that its building is very labor-intensive, and few people are willing or able to devote that much time when they can purchase or build a substitute, or get along without.

Hooper Bay was the last large Eskimo community in all North America to still use the kayak for traditional purposes. While I very much lament the demise of traditional kayak construction and use, I am heartened by the current interest shown in sea kayaking. I hope that we may be intelligent enough to take advantage of the 2,000+ years of kayak development and discover in replicas the joys of messing about in this most perfect of boats. There is no need to reinvent the wheel.

*David Zimmerly, a retired ethnologist for the National Museums of Canada, is now doing some private consulting in anthropology and microcomputer applications. He recently returned from an eight-month trip to the Bahamas on a sharpie he built.*

#### Further Reading:

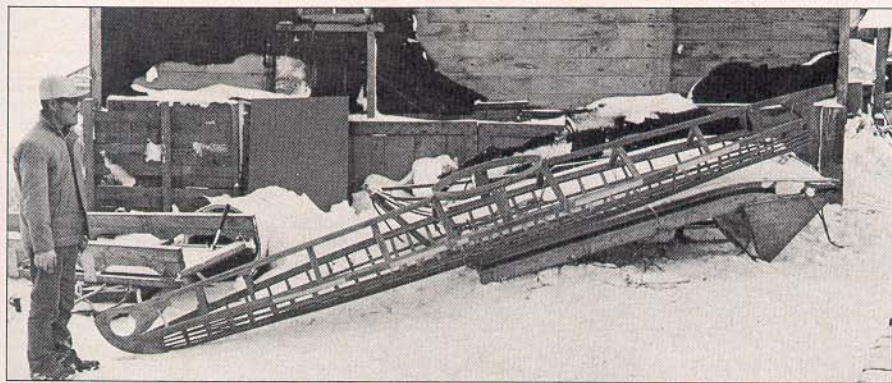
Zimmerly, David. *Hooper Bay Kayak Construction*. Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1979. (A good marine library may have a copy; unfortunately, this book is currently out of print.)

—. "An Annotated Bibliography of Kayaks." 1979. (A must for any kayak enthusiast; 27 pages of references to books, articles and plans. Order directly from Zimmerly for \$5.00.)

—. "Siberian Kayaks." Published in *The Ash Breeze*, No. 4, Dec. 1978. (Order a copy from the Traditional Small Craft Association, P.O. Box 350, Mystic, CT 06355.)

#### Plans:

David Zimmerly (193 Holmwood Ave., Ottawa, Canada K1S 2P3) has approximately 20 different sets of plans for arctic sea kayaks. Write for a listing. For those interested in working with full-size drawings of the Hooper Bay Kayak, a set of 7 sheets is available for \$35.00.



Above—The completed kayak frame just after being removed through a window in Dick Bunyan's house.

Below—The kayak with its canvas cover, painted with a typical water monster design.

