



A qajaq in Qaqortoq, Greenland

Photo: Helen Wilson

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EDITOR'S LETTER

Among the perks of serving as editor of *The Masik*—fame and fortune among them—is the opportunity to talk with Qajaq USA members about their passions. This issue is thick with examples.

Greg Stamer, founder, past-president and guiding light, explains what brought him to Greenland-style paddling techniques and equipment at a time where both were largely unknown in the United States. After decades at the forefront of Qajaq USA, Greg is stepping back to allow others to step forward.

Also inside, Fred Randall offers tips on how to use offsets to build a replica qajaq. Fred is a familiar face at symposiums across the country, where he's patiently demonstrated the fundamentals of skin-on-frame building.

On a more somber note, you'll find remembrances of significant figures in the furtherance of Greenland-style paddling in this country. Kamp Absolonson, a judge of the Greenland National Kayaking Championship, is eulogized within by Dubside, Alison Sigethy and Chris Beckman. Nick Schade serves up a tribute to Bobby Curtis, kayak builder, enthusiastic paddler and first editor of *The Masik*.

This time we've also made a departure from all-things-Greenlandic, with a note about a new Smithsonian book that surveys the bark canoes and skin boats of northern Eurasia, plus a taste of a *A Dream in Polar Fog*, a fascinating novel by the Chukchi writer Yuri Rytkheu, who describes a turn-of-the-20th-century collision between white explorers and the native people of the far northeastern Russian coast.

As always, we're eager to hear your ideas about topics to explore in future issues. You can contact me at publications@qajaqusa.org.

Until then, regards to all—Tony Schmitz



PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Several days ago, I found myself participating in an outdoor meeting. Chairs were spaced no closer than six feet apart, and everyone wore masks. The speaker was forced to yell loudly so that everyone could hear. Later that day, I was on a Zoom call with a group of people who all live within five miles of each other, two of us were quarantined. I found myself thinking that if someone could send today's photos back in time to a day last November, we'd all be shocked. 2020 has certainly been a crazy year.

One thing that COVID-19 has done, is while separating us, it has brought us all closer in a way. We're all finding ways to get through the year and maintain relationships with those that we love.

Despite all 2020 Qajaq USA sanctioned events being cancelled, and the temporary closure of some paddling venues, Qajaq USA's community has remained strong. Some of us have taken the time to reconnect with our passion for paddling through books, building projects, solo (or social distanced) paddles, etc. While we haven't had the opportunity to hug our friends at Qajaq USA sanctioned events, or laugh at rolling attempts or unexpected waves, we have had the opportunity to really think about, and appreciate, the way that life was, and the way that it will be again.

I'd like to thank Tony Schmitz for taking over the editing role of *The Masik*. I've enjoyed editing it for the past few years, but am happy to hand over the reins to someone who brings new enthusiasm and professional editing experience. I truly believe that the publication is in good hands. I'll still be working with Tony as the Assistant Editor and as the Art Director.

Stay safe out there. I wish you and your loved ones a wonderful Holiday season and a strong start to 2021.

Helen Wilson

President, Qajaq USA



Greg Stamer Takes a Break: Qajaq USA founder says, “Old voices have to let go”

After nearly 20 years as a founder, long-time president and guiding light to Qajaq USA, Greg Stamer is stepping down from the Board of Directors. Not from lack of interest, since he'll still be a Board Advisor and fill in the blanks about the organization's history. "But if Qajaq USA is really going to be a success," he says, "the old voices have to let go. It has to survive the founder. So it's time for me to step away and let other people push it into directions where they think it should go."

Greg got started on the path toward Greenland gear and paddling techniques in the late 1980s via articles published in the now defunct *Sea Kayaker* magazine, written by John Heath, the noted scholar of the far north. The people Heath wrote about and depicted in his film, *Greenlanders at Kodiak*, paddled skin boats in iceberg studded waters; Greg practiced in his plastic Aquaterra Chinook in the little lake behind the Florida house where he lived with his parents.

The 80s were a boom time for sea kayaking, he recalls. But the equipment of choice was often a bathtub sized folding boat, or awkward hard shelled interpretations of the sleek kayaks of the north. "I was attracted to the flowing, organic shape, the lines of the paddle," Stamer recalls. "It all had a sense of rightness to me."

But there was precious little information about the origins of kayaking at the time, and resistance to the lessons to be learned from the people who created the skin boat and stick-style paddles. Arguments about the efficiency of a Greenland stick were common; in some symposium classes they were disallowed; extending a paddle to brace or roll was frowned upon; and a gentle layback roll was often described as inferior to the C-to-C roll.

The paucity of information fed confusion. US paddlers were flying on instruments — using Heath's film clips and the scant written information to figure out what Greenlanders were up to. That changed in 1998, when Heath brought the Greenland kayak champion Maligiaq Padilla to the Delmarva paddling symposium with his sealskin kayak and tuilik. The following year Maligiaq was accompanied by Kaleraq Bech, president of the Greenland kayak club, Qaannat Kattuffiat, and his wife, Lone. Bech, tearful when he saw so many authentic skin on frame kayaks and people outside of Greenland interested in native knowledge, announced that foreigners would be allowed to compete in the national Greenland championships.

Stamer, along with fellow early adopters Cindy Cole, Mark Steinberg and Harvey Golden, made the trip to Greenland in 2000 for the Greenland national championship, where they got schooled on rolling techniques by the indefatigable Kamp Absalonsen. Afterward, Stamer was asked to describe the state of Greenland-style paddling in the US, and discuss the prospect of starting an American affiliate organization.

That idea had previously been greeted with apprehension among some Greenlanders. "There were a lot who didn't agree," Stamer remembers. "You don't call a kayak a boat in Greenland. A kayak is a kayak. It's almost a sacred object. They revere kayaks. A lot of Greenlanders said we don't even want to publish a list of the rolls. We don't want to share this stuff because it will just be something else that gets culturally appropriated by somebody else and they take it away from us."

There were additional questions of teaching style, Greg realized. "There, an instructor lectures very little and demonstrates. A student watches and learns. It's very different from a typical class setting here. Maybe we should kayak more and talk less."

"I explained that our idea was a cultural exchange. It's not our culture; it's your culture. We won't do anything that takes you away from the center of Greenland kayaking." The Board agreed, opening a path for incorporation of

Qajaq USA in 2002.

Since then, Qajaq USA has grown into an organization with hundreds of members, a vibrant website and forum, and sanctioned symposiums at locations across the country. Stamer, 60 now and still at his job, added to his other accomplishments circumnavigations of Iceland and Newfoundland with Greenland paddles at record clips, and a first place solo finish in the 300-mile Everglades Challenge. (Read more at www.gregstamer.com.)

“Paddling has been my passion. It depends on where you get your purpose. Work is always important. You want to make enough money so you’re not starving. But if people asked me who I was, I wouldn’t say I was a senior programmer at ATT or I worked at Bell Labs. I’d tell them I’m a kayaker.”





Virtual Exhibit: Kayak! at Bowdoin College's Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum

Check out the online exhibition, *Kajak!*, now on view at the Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum at Maine's Bowdoin College, <https://www.bowdoin.edu/arctic-museum/exhibits/2020/kayak-exhibition.html>. The virtual exhibit includes an extensive collection of kayak and umiak models, related clothing and equipment, historic film, plus video of Qajaq USA member Fred Randall and Inuk kayak builder Noah Nochasak constructing a replica of a traditional Labrador kayak. The exhibit also offers a YouTube presentation (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTmcLhBNxjU&feature=emb_logo) by kayak historian/builder Harvey Golden on hunting kayaks of the far north.





Bye-Bye, Eskimo Pie: The derogatory product name gets retired

Here's another entry for the overdue cultural sensitivity file: the makers of the chocolate-covered ice cream treat, Eskimo Pie, have changed the name to Edy's Pie.

Why now? It's part of an ongoing concern with racial equity worldwide, a Dreyer's Grand Ice Cream spokesperson told *The Masik*. Many Inuit and Yupik people view the word eskimo as a derogatory term from the colonial past. The company's marketing of the nearly 100-year old confection featured a dark-haired child in mittens and a fur-hooded parka.

"We are committed to being a part of the solution on racial equality, and recognize the term is inappropriate," said Elizabell Marquez, Dreyer's marketing head. "This move is part of a larger review to ensure our company and brands reflect our people's values."

It's been a tough year for images from corporate marketing's past that have not yet been put to rest. Joining Eskimo Pie in this category are Uncle Ben, Aunt Jemima and Mrs. Butterworth, plus the nameless logo image of Cream of Wheat. Aunt Jemima is being retired. Prompted by Aunt Jemima's demise, producers of Uncle Ben's, Cream of Wheat and Mrs. Butterworth say they're reconsidering their use of marketing images that lean on racial stereotypes. The repackaged and renamed ice cream bar will be available in the new year.

First Steps in Building a Replica Qajaq: Letting the original builder speak to you

By Fred Randall

I build replicas of Inuit qajaqs, almost exclusively, to learn about qajaq design and performance. The few non-replicas I have built have been based on what I have learned from the design parameters of replicas. I started building skin-on-frame (sof) qajaqs believing they gave the most flexibility in design shape, and would allow me to use my engineering background to build a “better” qajaq. While building my first sof, I was introduced to Harvey Golden’s newly published tome, *Kayaks of Greenland*. It quickly became obvious that the Inuit knew more than I could learn in a lifetime on my own. So I started building replicas and paddling them. I like to say in paddling that the replica/original builder “speaks to you” when you experience how the qajaq responds to the water, to waves, to wind, to paddle strokes and to your movements. Understandably, the qajaq is not in its Arctic environment and is not being used for hunting but for recreation, thus, many of the design elements cannot be experienced or heard.

My appreciation and respect for these crafts is naturally reflected in my respect for the builders, the Inuit. I have read many books and audited classes offered at Bowdoin College, which increased my understanding and respect. I like to use the names in Inuktitut, Inuit names, in speaking of the qajaq parts. I think it is more respectful. My Inuk friend Noah Nochasak, the Kayak Revival Lead for the Nunatsiavut government, has taught me the names in the Nunatsiavut dialect of inuktitut, the Labrador dialect. It was taught to him by twelve elders he interviewed. I will try to use those terms throughout, with the English terms in parentheses. It is also available online through the Bowdoin Arctic Museum at <https://www.bowdoin.edu/arctic-museum/exhibits/2020/kayak-exhibition.html>.

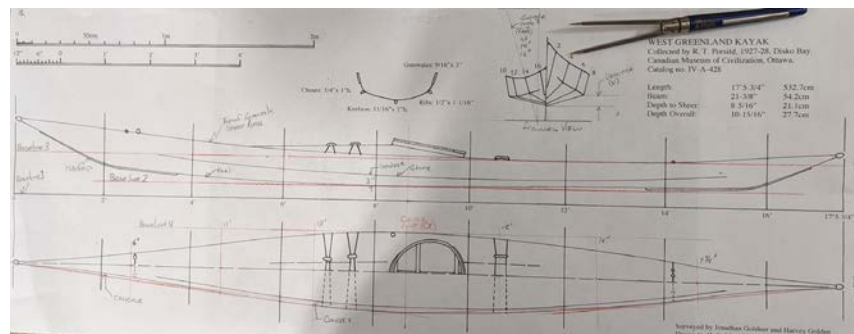
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English	Inukitut Nunatsiavut dialect	Inukitut Greenlandic dialect
kayak	Kajait kayak	qajaq
bow	usujak	usuusaq
front of kayak	sivuk	
gunwale	Apummak Apummâk (pl)	apummak
deck beams	ajayk ajât	ajaat (pl)
curved deck beams		seqqortarfik
ribs	tippik tikpik	tippik
foot brace	tukkiqummiak	
forward support beam for coaming	masik	masik
aft support beam for coaming	Ittivilik	Issefrik
back of kayak	akkojak	
coaming	Pâ pâk	paaq
keel keelson	Kujâk niutâk	niutaaq
chine	sianik	siaaneq
deck stringer	kijuatjuk	Tunersuk (fwd) Issefrip tunnersui (aft)
skin	amik	amiq
deck strap	takkat	

With my experiences have come opinions about the design elements of a qajaq that are relevant to the design objectives for recreational kayaking (e.g., day paddles, multi-day trips, surfing, rough water, rock-gardening, rolling, etc). And so when I look at a qajaq drawing, before I think about developing a list of offsets (the qajaq's dimensions), I look carefully at the drawing to try to consider the design elements.



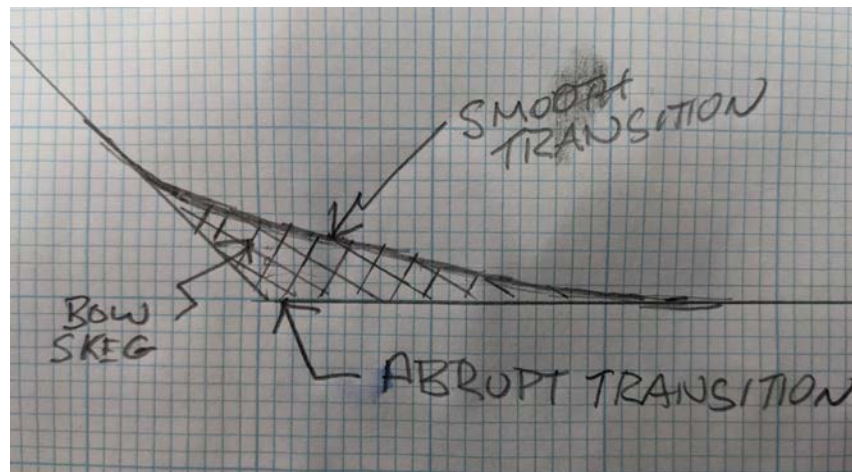
Looking at the drawing above;

1. The center drawing is the profile drawing
2. The lower drawing is the plan drawing
3. The top center drawing is the frames drawing

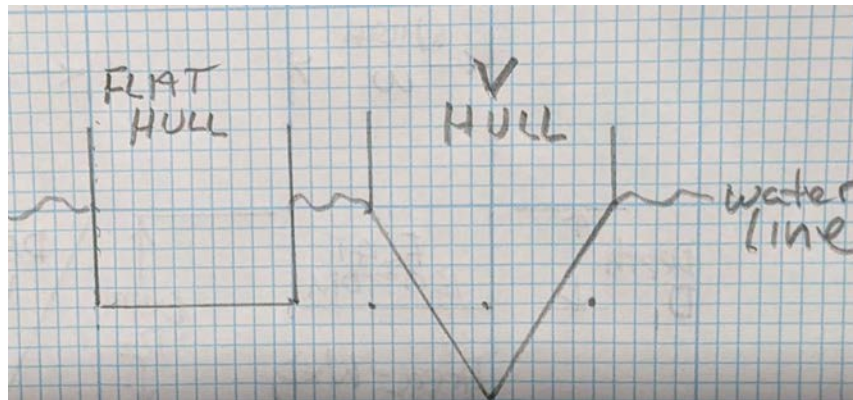


Starting with the profile drawing (shown above), I shift the baseline (line at bottom of figure) up to the niutâk (keel) and sheer line of the qajaq (red lines). Quick definition here: rocker is the curve of the niutâk, like the rocker on a rocking chair; sheerline is the line running along the top of the apummak (gunwale) from bow to stern. By doing that, I can easily judge the rocker and sheerline shape. A characteristic common in Greenland is that the qajaq's depth aft of the pâk (coaming) is fairly constant up to the stern. The same can be said with caveats forward of the pâk. While the depth does increase due to the sheer, it is partially offset by the rocker.

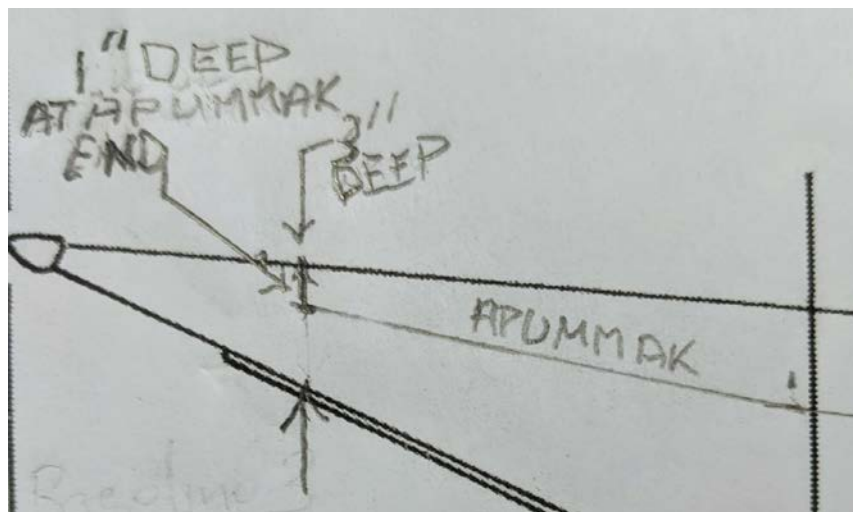
- This qajaq has 3 to 4 " of rocker in the bow and is very flat in the stern.
- There is a good amount of sheer in the bow, but aft of the isserfik the sheer is almost flat, except at the stern. The bow sheer creates more volume, providing lift and a drier ride when paddling into a wave or surfing down said wave.
- The transition from the niutâk to the stem line (cutwater) in the bow is very smooth. In my opinion, the smooth transition and the rocker at the bow help to "unlock" the bow from the bow wave and thus reduce weathercocking. The drawing below illustrates the point. I call the hatched area between the smooth transition and the abrupt transition, the bow skeg!



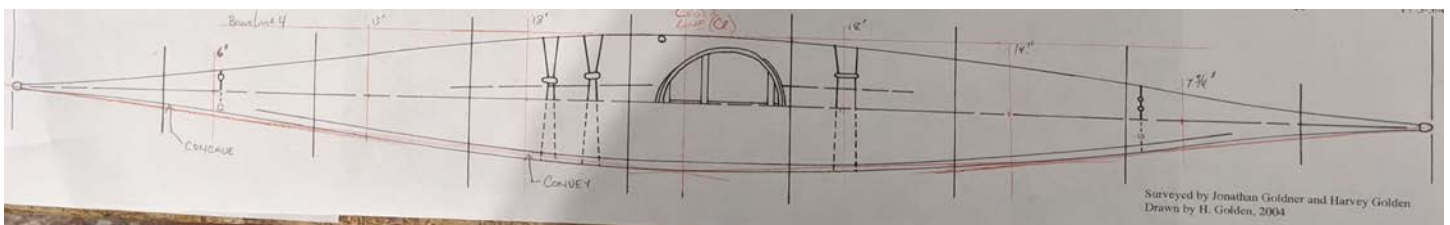
- The vertical distance the sianik (chine) is from the niutâk (keel) indicates the hull shape or hull V, as in the illustration below. At eight feet from the bow, I have measured the vertical distance to be three inches. That indicates a moderately deep "V." This can easily be visualized in the frame view. A "V" bottom hull sinks deeper in the water than a comparable flat bottom hull. This is because a V shaped hull must sink deeper to displace the same amount of water as a flat bottom hull. The center of gravity (c.g) of the paddler is therefore also lower, which reduces the over turning moment, resulting in a more stable qajaq. On the other hand, when on land or landing, a "V" shaped hull wants to sit on one side of the "V" or the other. Landing a qajaq of this design on an ice sheet would be problematic for the paddler, with the likelihood of ending up in the water.



- I also use this drawing to determine the apummak (gunwale) length. I want the ends of the apummak to be a minimum of one inch deep (increasing to full depth over approximately 18 inches). I want my stem pieces to be approximately two inches at the apummak ends. That is a hull depth of three inches. Using my dividers, I determine that width to be at eight-ish inches from the bow and nine-ish inches from the stern. That can be adjusted slightly to get a 16 foot length of wood for my apummak, a standard length for milled lumber.

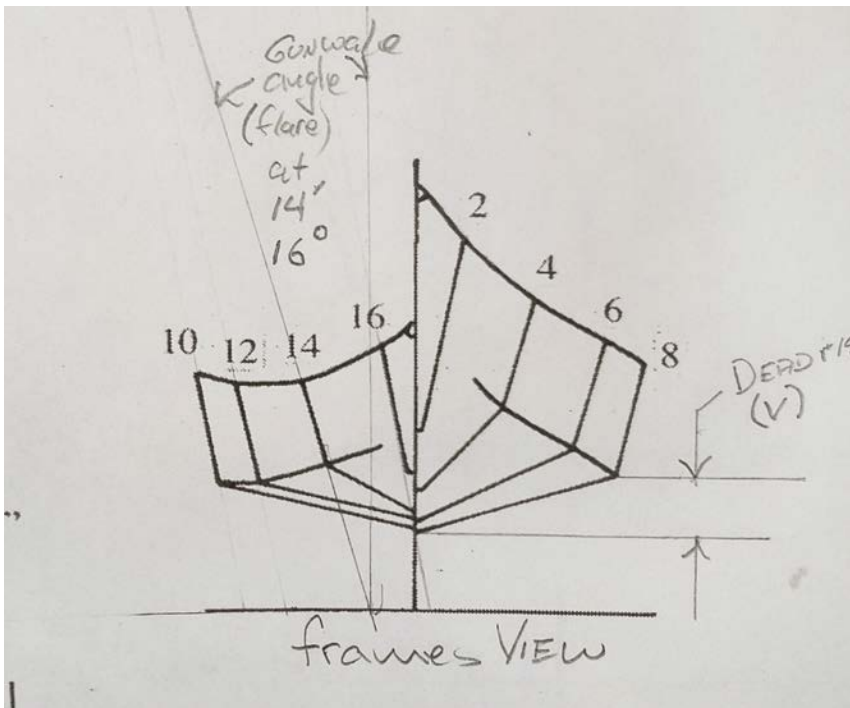
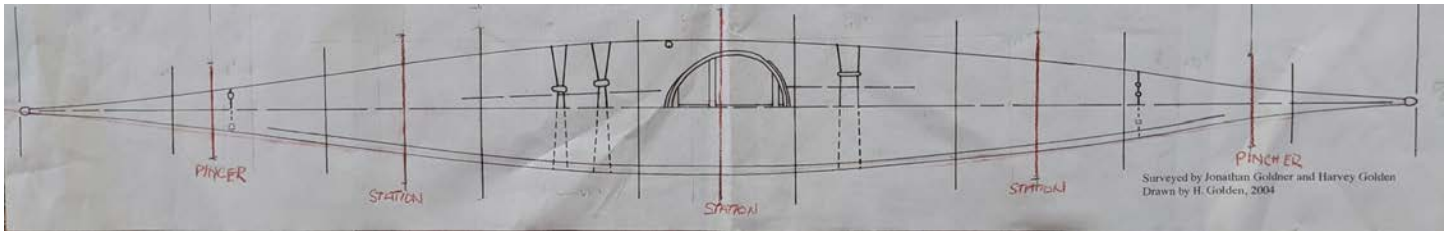


The plan view gives a quick look at the symmetry of the qajaq, and other characteristics of its shape. The line down the center is the center line. Here I have noted the midship line of the qajaq and two feet, four feet and six feet fore and aft from midship, recording the width of the qajaq at each location.



- Looking at the widths at the locations two, four and six feet from midship, indicates the qajaq is close to symmetrical. The pâk (coaming) is close to midships. (Note: When I build a replica, I need greater length between the masak and iittivik (isserfik) for entry. I accomplish this by moving the iittivik aft. That moves my c.g. aft, and helps reduce weathercocking.)

- The hull form changes from convex to concave at about five and 14-½ feet. This results in less volume in the bow and stern than a qajaq that remains convex throughout.
- I usually build using three stations and two pinchers to shape the apummâk (gunwales). Of the three stations, one is at maximum beam (maximum width at the top of the apummâk), the other two are back one to two feet from the point the apummâk shape changes from convex to concave. I think good station locations will be midship, six and 13 feet, with the pinchers at 2-½ and 15-½ feet. The stations and pinchers are shown below.



The frame's view, shown here, gives much of the same information as the profile and plan view.

- I use it primarily to calculate apummâk (gunwale) angles. A quick look indicates the angles are fairly consistent with moderate flare.
- The V shape of the hull is readily observable on the frames view.
- Looking at where the frames land on the centerline of the drawing reveals the rocker.

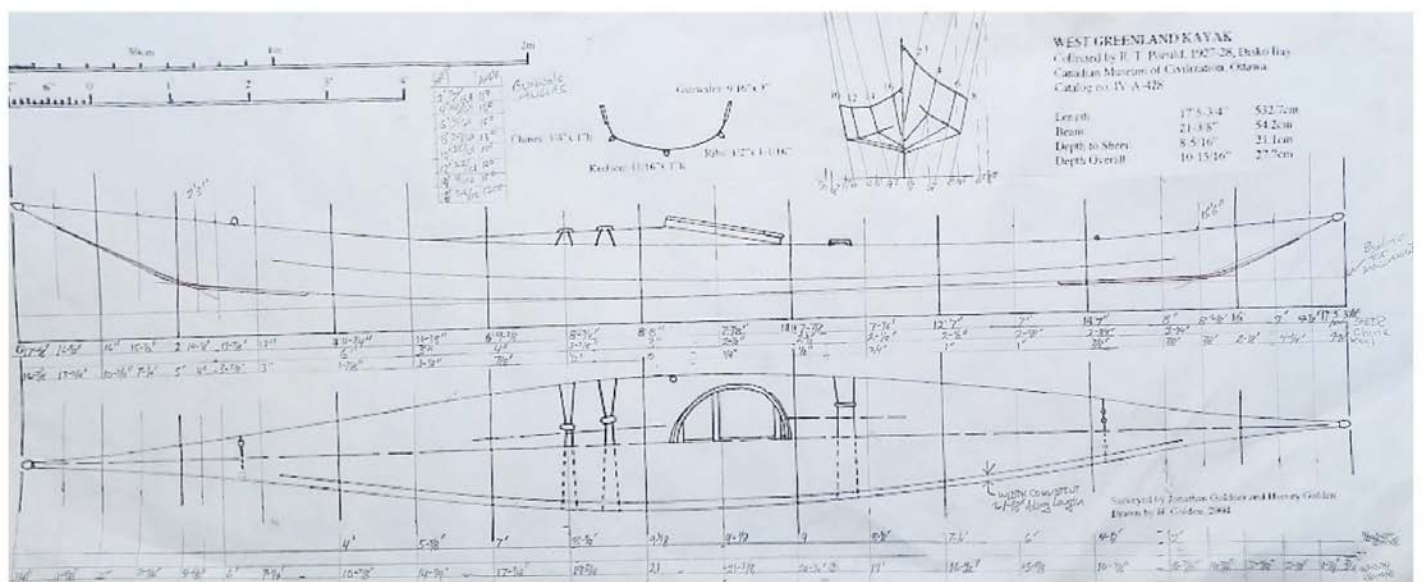
A building noted for Greenland qajaqs: The flare and bow of the apummâk contribute to the sheer of the apummâk, providing natural sheer. Removing or adding wood from/to the apummâk to create the design sheer is called shaping the apummâk. Normally the natural sheer from four' to five to 14 feet along the length of the qajaq is enough to accomplish the design sheer. No shaping of the apummâk is necessary. This is important in my building method. When I build I assume I will not need to shape the apummâk at my stations. So if the height of the stations match the height of the sheer as indicated in the drawing, the apummâk should sit perfectly in the stations.



The photo above illustrates this. The stations shown are for the DeRijp qajaq, figure 3 in Harvey Golden's "Kayaks of Greenland." The shorter two are the midship and aft stations. The taller one is the forward station. When properly spaced on my workbenches, which act as my baseline for building, the apummâk will sit perfectly in them.

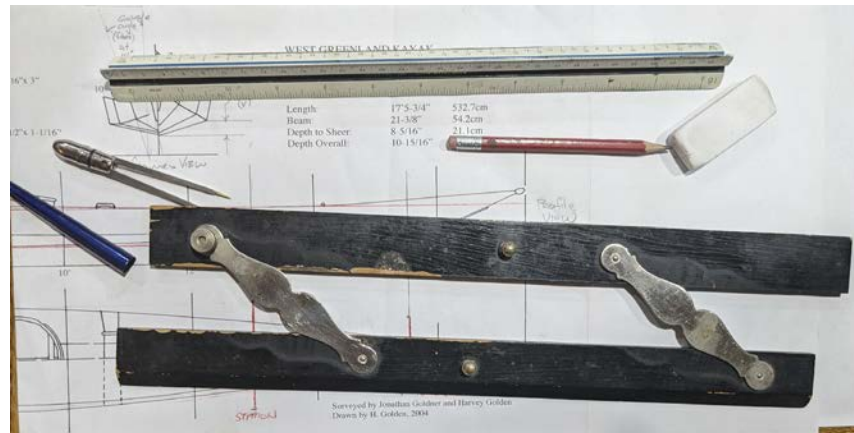
From this quick review of the drawing, my opinion is that this qajaq will be very stable, with minimal weathercocking, and because of the length and rocker, have good maneuverability. But I would advise practicing entry from a dock, pool edge, rock, or if you must, standing in the water. It should give a relatively dry ride in rougher seas. For rock gardening, and arguably surfing, I might want to add more rocker aft.

Developing a List of Offsets



PhotoScan by Google Photos

A list of offsets—the qajaq’s dimensions—is required to build a replica of a qajaq. The list is developed from a scaled drawing of the qajaq. In this case, I have a drawing of a West Greenland Qajaq, figure 65 in Harvey Golden’s “Kayaks of Greenland.” The only tools needed to develop a list of offsets are dividers, a straight edge/ruler, pencil and eraser. I also use a parallel ruler. It is handy but not required. At the top of the drawing is the frames view. The frames view can be thought of as slicing through the qajaq every two feet, keeping the right side of that cut from the bow to midship, and the left side from midship to stern. Below the frames view is the profile view, followed by the plan view.

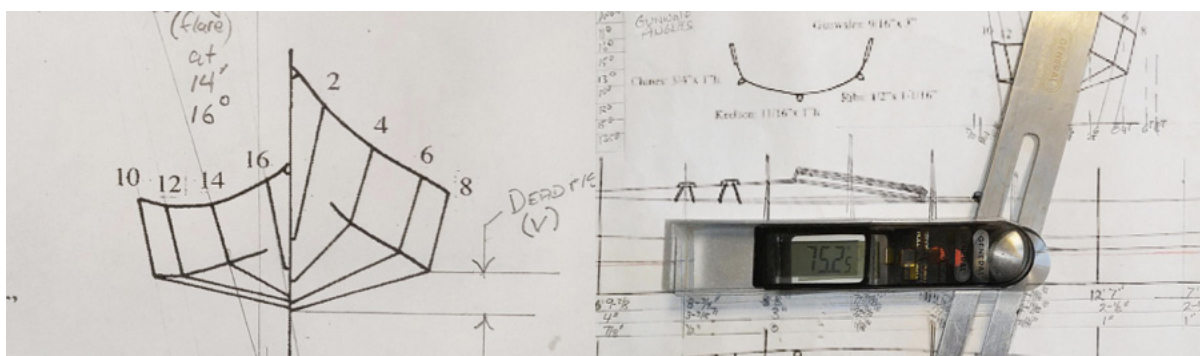


The list of offsets includes the width and height of the shear line (top of apummak (gunwale), sianik (chines) and niutāk (keelson) along the length of the qajaq. I use six inch non-locking dividers to measure the distances. The scale, top left on the drawing, gives the units measured. The measurements are recorded below the view (profile or plan).

- For the heights, the distance measured is from the baseline on the profile view to the apummakk, sianik or niutāk.
- For the widths, the measurements are from the centerline (niutāk) on the plan view to the apumak or sianik.

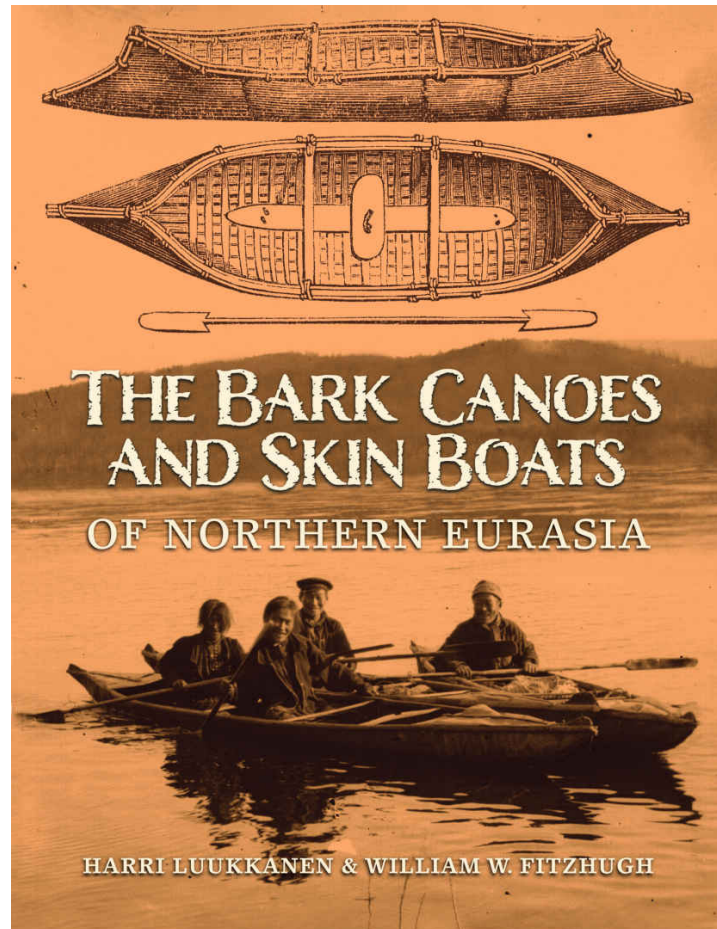
Measurements every foot or two are more than sufficient except at the ends where the shape changes quickly. At the end measurements, every three to six inches should be sufficient. Measurements where the niutāk and stem edges meet are helpful in capturing the stem (cutwater) shape accurately.

The apummak (gunwale) angle is also needed to build a replica. Often the angle changes along the length of the gunwale. I use the frame views to determine the angle. I use simple trigonometry to do this as illustrated in the figure below to the left, but a simple digital sliding T-bevel gauge could be used as illustrated in the figure below to the right. The list of apummak angles is tabulated in the drawing above.



During the build process I am constantly going to the drawing to get measurements from the list of offsets, checking measurements, redlining the drawing to note the “as built” dimensions or simply adding notes. The drawing and dividers live under the replica being built. At the end of the process, the scale on the drawing is worn out, the drawing is frayed, stained from coffee spills and watermarked from the cup.





Must Have for the Kayaker's Book Shelf

New book surveys native craft from Northern Europe to China

The Bark Canoes and Skin Boats of Northern Eurasia by Harri Luukkanen and William W. Fitzhugh

Smithsonian Books, 276 Pages

Here's another small-boat tome to put on your shelf between the classic Adney and Chappelle *Bark Boats and Skin Boats of North America*, and Harvey Golden's *Kayaks of Alaska* and *Kayaks of Greenland*. *The Bark Boats and Skin Boats of Northern Eurasia*, just released by Smithsonian Books, explores the native vessels created in the vast area of the Eurasian far north.

The book is the result of a 15-year effort by William Fitzhugh, director of the Smithsonian's Arctic Studies Center,

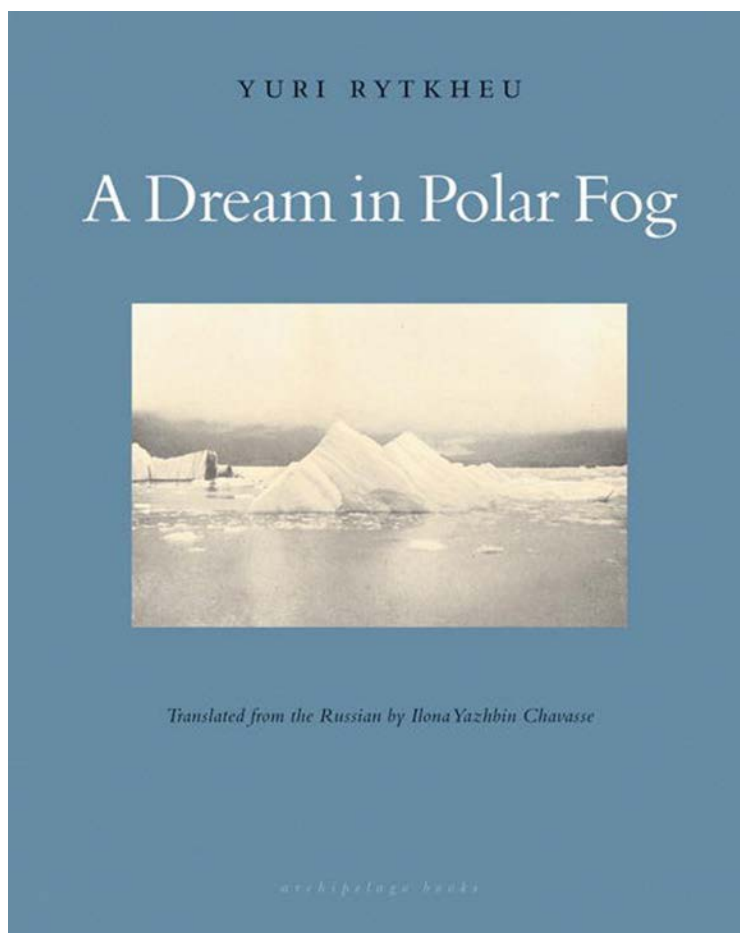
and Harri Luukkanen, a researcher and paddling enthusiast in Helsinki. Their work traces types and uses of the skin and bark watercraft of more than 40 cultures in the region stretching from northern Europe to the Bering Strait and Far East.

Fitzhugh, who is now logging his fiftieth year at the Smithsonian, explained recently that he came to the work with a background as a paddling enthusiast. “I’ve been in and out of boats all my life,” having logged miles of travel in Canada and the Adirondacks via canoe. He connected with his eventual co-author when Luukkanen sent him a copy of a paper he had written on the history of Finnish canoes. After a meet-up at a conference in Norway, the pair decided to set out on an addition to the literature that would be similar to the Adney/Chappelle work.

Their research came with some built-in limitations. Skin and bark boats are by their nature ephemeral—eager to rot and disappear. Often enough, Fitzhugh says, remains are discovered by bulldozer during a construction project, and the artifact that the driver might notice appears to be nothing more than a clump of mostly rotted bark. While Fitzhugh and Luukkanen could mine information in Russian and other European languages, they assume there is an immense repository of information in Chinese that was difficult to access. “It’s an introduction to the topic,” said Fitzhugh—a foundation that can be built upon.

While the ancient kayaks and canoes disappear, paddles are more apt to survive—sunk in bogs and rivers, or discovered in digs at hunting and fishing camps. Paddles dated as 8,700 years old have been uncovered. Where the boats they drove have been swallowed by history, nonetheless, the configuration of the paddle can suggest something about the boat’s depth, length and weight.

At almost 250 text-heavy pages, this is a volume that will take you through the winter as it explores watercraft development along the major waterways of northern Eurasia. The surveys of native watercraft that are a prominent feature of the Adney/Chappelle work, or Harvey Golden’s books, are not available here, so replica builders will have to hope and wait for drawings that will allow them to build their own versions of intriguing boats such as the sturgeon-snouted Amur canoe featured on the cover of this engrossing new book.



Abandoned in the Far North

A Chukchi writer imagines a white explorer transformed in a native village

A Dream in Polar Fog

By Yuri Rytheu, Translated from Russian by Ilona Yashbin Chavasse

337 Pages, Archipelago Books

Looking to add a novel to your winter reading list? Nail down a copy of *A Dream in Polar Fog*, a fascinating look at the intersection between the Chukchi culture of the Russian far north and its invasion by white explorers and exploiters.

Written in Russian by Yuri Rytkheu, the child of a Chukchi trapper and hunter, and translated by Ilona Yashbin

Chavasse, the novel opens with an explosion. After lingering too long into Autumn on the coast north of the Bering Sea, the captain of Belinda finds himself trapped in ice. He sends out a young shipmate, John MacLennan, to take a chance on setting explosive charges in the ice to free a path to open water. Four of five packets explode. When MacLennan pokes at the dud, it blows up, taking with it most of his hands.

The Belinda's captain promises the men of a nearby Chukchi village a treasure—three Winchester rifles with cartridges—if they'll transport MacLennan by dog sled to a distant hospital. The captain promises he'll wait for MacLennan's return after treatment. But that pact is forgotten when wind opens a path to open water. Gangrene-stricken during his trip to the hospital, MacLennan is saved by an amputation performed by a shaman in a reindeer hide covered shelter on the tundra. He returns from the nightmare journey to discover that he's been abandoned.

His only choice: find a way to survive in an alien culture based on hunting and herding reindeer. With stumps for hands, and little relevant knowledge, he is the least capable person in the village.

The novel is crammed with details on hunting, shelter, food, spirituality and human relationships in a tight community that offers few possibilities of escape. MacLennan is slowly transformed and is pushed to find ways to make himself a contributing member of this society. After a hunting accident in which he kills one of the villagers, he takes on the man's wife and child and has children of his own.

When a ship appears that could return him to his Canadian home, he's faced with a profound decision. Will he flee or remain with his Chukchi family?

Order A Dream in Polar Fog from Archipelago Books.

(<https://archipelagobooks.org/book/a-dream-in-polar-fog/#:~:text=Book%20Description&text=A%20Dream%20in%20Polar%20Fog%20is%20at%20once%20a%20cross,left%20behind%20by%20his%20ship.>)

Following is an excerpt.

Excerpt: “It was an accident, right?”

They heard a splash. A whiskered head came up through the water’s smooth, still surface.

“Shhh.” Toko took aim. “Don’t you shoot. I’ll do it.”

John lowered the muzzle of his Winchester.

A lakhtak (bearded seal) was rapidly approaching shore. Evidently, he was intending to climb on the ice and warm himself under the spring sunshine. Two smooth waves radiated from the sides of the whiskered head. John was amazed at his speed. The beast was very close when the shot rang out. The bullet hit his head. Death was instantaneous, but sheer inertia still propelled the bearded seal to the shoreline.

Toko grabbed a light boat hook and threw himself onto the edge of the icy escarpment. He tried to maneuver the lakhtak (paddling jacket made of sea mammal gut) onto the metal hook, but it turned out to be missing just a bit of reach, the length of an index finger. Toko bent over the edge of the ice barrier, hanging over the water. He had almost managed to reach the seal and was about to lunge forward to hook the carcass, when, all of a sudden, he was sliding down the ice, and a loud crashing crack and a fountain of spray, he fell into the sea. And immediately went under. Surfacing, his face contorted in terror as he made ungainly attempts to stay afloat.

Remembering that the none of Chukchi could swim at all, John rushed to the icy edge, thrusting out to the drowning man the first thing that came to hand – a Winchester.

Toko caught the faceted barrel and grabbed it tight. The sharp foresight cut into his palm, keeping his hand from slipping.

John made a supreme effort and, pulling backwards, dragged Toko halfway up. His water-logged clothes streaming, the not-so-tall and certainly not portly Toko became remarkably heavy. Toko bent over the edge of the ice-shelf. John felt easier. He looked down at his hands, and the hairs on the back of his neck stood up: slowly, the thick hide loop that had been sewn onto his leather-covered stump was sliding down . . . But Toko was almost completely on

top of the ice. John shifted the whole of the weight to his left hand, where the leather ring held fast, and tried to move his right hand further up, behind the trigger.

And then a gunshot rang out! John snapped around, jolted, not comprehending that the Winchester had fired in his own hands. When the recognition pierced his brain, and his eyes registered a spreading crimson stain under Toko's limp form, he couldn't hold back a terrified scream.

"Toko! Toko! Was it really my Winchester?"

"You hit me," Toko moaned quietly. He let go of the gun's barrel, and his body began a slow descent toward the sea, leaving a wide blood trail on the ice.

John lunged forward and grabbed Toko's kamleika (paddling jacket made of sea mammal gut) with his teeth, pulling him away from the edge. Making sure that there was no more danger of falling in, John turned Toko over on his back.

His face was leached of color and deathly pale. Slowly, painfully, Toko opened his eyes and his dry lips whispered:

"The blood is leaving me . . ."

John moved his eyes to the wound. Ringed with a large bloody stain, a dark hole rent the kamleika. It was not very big, not even a finger's breadth. Blood gushed from it in uneven spurts.

"Close it with snow . . . Snow dipped in water . . ."

John threw himself into gathering the meager remains of gray unmelted snow. He scraped up snow with his stumps and packed it over the wound. Carefully cutting open the kamleika and kukhlianka, he laid Toko's chest bare. The snow, quickly saturated with blood, was melting. Then John pulled off his kamleika, tore it into wide strips with his teeth, and tried to wind them tightly around Toko's chest.

The wounded man was groaning quietly, without opening his eyes. Finished with the bandaging, John leaned close

to Toko's face and asked:

"How are you doing?"

"Cold, and I'm thirsty . . ."

John put a handful of snow into the open mouth.

"How am I going to get you home?"

"Leave me here, go get the sled," Toko managed.

"No, I won't leave you."

"You're not to blame. It could happen to anyone. It's not your fault."

John looked at the lakhtak stretched out nearby with hatred, as though the animal were responsible, and then an idea came to him like a lightning bolt:

"Toko! I can drag you back on the lakhtak skin!"

No time to waste, John took out his knife, stuck it into the holder loop and fell to skinning the carcass. He left a layer of blubber with the sealskin, so that the wounded man would not feel the hard ice.

"Careful now," Toko cautioned, "Don't tear the skin."

John had never had to butcher a kill before. He was soon covered in blood. Finally he pried the lakhtak hide from the body, and rolled the skinned carcass to one side. Carefully he lifted Toko onto the spread-out sealskin, wrapped the ends around him and stitched it closed, using a piece of leather thong from his akyn.

Putting on his snowshoes, so that the torbasses' soles wouldn't skid on the ice, John secured the harness around himself and set off for the shore. He was hurrying but, for the wounded man's sake, went around the knots of ice and jutting cracks, trying to step only over smooth, even ice. At first glance, you might have thought that nothing extraordinary had happened: just a returning hunter, dragging a downed lakhtak behind him. From time to time John halted and went back to Toko.

"How are you feeling?"

"Not bad," Toko tried to smile. "Put some more snow in my mouth. Even better, chip off a bit of ice with your knife. I am cold . . . and thirsty . . ."

"Just hold on," John told him, hacking at the ice, "only a little left to go until we get to the shore."

The sun was low overhead. Ice hummocks, shoreline crags, and men threw long blue shadows.

At moments it seemed to John that his heart was about to burst from his chest. It was thumping somewhere close to his gullet, there wasn't enough air – but John couldn't stop to rest. There was not a single coherent thought in his head, only a strange and senseless phrase that beat at him without cease:

"I killed a whale! . . . I killed a whale! . . . I killed a whale!"

Slowly, the shoreline neared. There they were – the Sacred Whale Jaws... "I killed a whale! I killed a whale!" It suddenly seemed to John that Toko was dead. Frantically, he threw off the harness and bent over the wounded man. John's own breathing was loud and labored, his eyes swimming with tears and salty perspiration. Then he pressed his lips close to Toko's lips. They were warm, and even trembled.

With renewed strength, John pulled the makeshift sled. He didn't feel the harness strap cut through his kukhlianka. The yarangas came into view. From this distance they did not look like human dwellings, more like a configuration of enormous boulders. But already John could tell which yaranga belonged to whom, and even see its inhabitants with his mind's eye.

He could see Pyl'mau's eyes, Orvo's face, rough as though hewn from dark stone, Armol's narrow piercing eyes . . .

He could even imagine the hunters, gathering by Toko's yaranga, passing the binoculars from hand to hand . . .

But it was his gun that fired, and his bullet that is lodged in Toko's breast! If Toko died, it was far from certain what vengeance the people of Enmyn would wreak on the foreigner. True, a court of law would consider the extenuating circumstances that lessened the accused man's crime. It does happen that the defendant is cleared of wrongdoing. But John didn't know what kind of court the Chukchi had, or whether they had one at all. And if Toko died, there would be no one to corroborate John's story.

MacLennan halted once more.

Toko was breathing, he even opened his eyes halfway and again asked for some ice. "We're almost there," John crooned to him, gently placing slivers of ice into his mouth. "We're almost there. You'll tell them it was an accident, right? You'll tell them?"

Toko closed his eyes, exhausted.

"Why don't you answer?" John shook the man by his shoulders, unconscious that he was causing him pain.

Toko moaned and opened his eyes.

"It was an accident? Right?"

Toko's eyes were looking straight into the sky. They were still alive, but already they were seeing another world, a world amazing in that it was just the same familiar one, with all his friends and near ones. Everything was the same here – people's faces, and their conversations, and the food, of which there was plenty. But the main thing was that there was no sadness on the people's faces in this other world; they knew nothing of hunger, backbreaking labor, suffering, cold and pain. There was only one drawback – there was not much water here, and it was the only thing that people treasured. But since it was mainly sea hunters who lived here, they were used to thirst and did not suffer much, making do with whatever water fell to their share . . .

Sensing that something terrible and irreparable was taking place behind his back, John was not watching his path now, heading straight for the yarangas. He climbed the mounds of ice and even attempted to run over the flat stretches of ice. He was sobbing aloud, howling and groaning, swallowing sweat mixed with tears, and still the words hammered in his head:

“I killed a whale! I killed a whale!” The crowd by the side of the yaranga was very close now, but he couldn’t make out the faces, only the wall of mouths that shouted at him:

“You have killed your brother only because he is not like you! . . .”



Remembering Kamp Absalonsen The big-hearted, gruff Greenland competition judge

Large and in charge; the big guy with the bushy eyebrows

By Dubside

Qaannat Kattufiat (QK) is populated by a diverse collection of unique and colorful individuals who share a passion about kayaks but don't always agree with each other on the best way to perpetuate the traditional kayaking legacy. (This is a characteristic shared with the membership of Qajaq USA.) In 2000 the Greenlanders decided to open the competition to outsiders. In the last 20 years, foreigners have sometimes felt quite welcome and appreciated, other times not sure if their hosts resented them or had grown tired of the bother. The new faces that appeared with every QK staff turnover kept us guessing as to the prospects for outside competitors. Yet there was always one constant we could depend on. Kamp Absalonsen was in favor of foreigners participating. And he went out of his way for us, in his own idiosyncratic style.

Before I went to my first Greenland competition in 2004, Greg Stamer warned me about the 'Russian Judge,' who was not actually Russian but matched the stereotype of a burly, cantankerous, senior Soviet. I was advised to try to stay on his good side. In Qaqortoq, where the games were held that year, Kamp was large and in charge, the big guy with the bushy eyebrows.

At times he could seem gruff or abrupt. That was just part of his unique personality. Underneath was a heart of pure gold. Kamp and I got on pretty well. At the start of every day he was often one of the first to arrive at breakfast. He proved to be a valuable resource, as he could speak English, although he spoke it in his own unique way and had a habit of throwing in occasional French phrases for variety. During the competition events, as well as the socializing afterwards, he was a big help as I naively attempted to navigate Greenland culture.

I can still vividly recall asking him, “Why do the rules allow separate boats for rolling and racing? Wouldn’t seal hunters have to use one boat for everything?” He frowned and quickly turned his back to me. Puzzled, I repeated the question. Finally he said, with annoyance, “You want boat, you take ship in the ocean.” I had committed the grave transgression of referring to a kayak using a term that Kamp stubbornly insisted was inappropriate. Upon realizing my mistake, I profusely apologized, corrected myself and renewed my effort to follow Greg’s advise.

The abundance of encouragement, assistance and support both Cheri Perry and I got that year from Kamp wasn’t a first. He’d taken Cindy Cole under his wing the same way in 2000. And he continued to lay out the red carpet for Alison Sigethy, McKinley Rodriguez, Helen Wilson, Heather Lamond, Freya Lockwood and others. In 2007 Kamp was the guest at Delmarva, allowing a large segment of traditional paddlers in the U.S. to meet and interact with the celebrated Greenland Competition Judge. Besides tapping into his wealth of knowledge, we got him on the water in a kayak, something he hadn’t done in ages. He was also happily reunited with Cindy Cole, who by that time had been battling cancer for years and thought she would never see him again. (Indeed, less than six months later Cindy passed away.)

In 2009 at the games in Ilulissat during the final dinner and awards ceremony, Kamp officially retired as a competition judge. Everyone present lined up to offer farewell appreciations one by one, as Kamp tried unsuccessfully to refrain from shedding a tear. In subsequent years he often attended the games as a spectator, still keenly interested in seeing kayaking perpetuated as a new generation came on board. In 2015, qualified judges were in short supply, so Kamp was pressed into service and found himself, microphone in hand, scoring rolling competitors, as naturally and confidently as he’d done before many of the participants were born.

I can’t speak for Greenlanders, but I can say with certainty that the 20 years of interaction between Inuits and foreigners at the Championship Games has been an immensely positive experience for us. Its impact has radiated

through traditional paddling circles everywhere. We owe Kamp much of the credit.

In recent years Kamp appeared at the games, maybe only for a day or two during the week of the event. He was noticeably slower on his feet, a little harder of hearing, undeniably getting older, but still as passionate as ever about the Greenland kayak. And there was not one speck of tarnish on his heart of gold.

No, he said. That's stupid.

By Chris Beckman

I think Kamp was humbled by our passion for preserving the Greenland traditions and mystified (some might even say annoyed) at our pursuit of the minutiae in Greenland qajaq design.

The qajaq to him was an extension of the paddler's soul and very personal; built by and for the paddler, with knowledge passed down through generations and materials that were on hand. It was a qajaq, not a boat.

During a Q&A session at Delmarva in 2007, when asked if they still used seal skin, Kamp said, "No, that's stupid, we use nylon." When asked about materials, he said they used what they have. There are no Home Depots in Greenland.

His spoken English was limited, and his response to many questions was, "No, that's stupid." As in, "Did he spend much time rolling?" His reply: "No that's stupid, water cold."

Alison's Stories

By Alison Sigethy

Kamp Absolonson was a big guy with a big heart and a big personality. He was memorable. Everyone lucky enough to know him has multiple stories. Here are a few of mine.

Tom Milani, you're next

Everyone who goes to Greenland for the games goes with different goals or expectations. When I went, my goal was to participate in every event. So I worked hard to get at least a qualifying score in all nine events. My husband, Tom, didn't. He wasn't going to compete. He went for the experience and to support me. So, when Kamp, who

was judging the ropes event, called out, “Tom Milani, you’re next,” Tom was surprised. He hadn’t planned on doing ropes. He hadn’t signed up for the event and he didn’t actually know many rope maneuvers. But, Kamp just announced he was up, so he got up, did the rope maneuvers he knew, and then with some help and coaching, knocked off a couple more. Even though this was not in his plans, I think he was happy having done it—and I know Kamp was happy he did it.

That’s the Greenlandic way. Greenlanders want everyone to join in. Whether it’s singing and dancing after a meal or competing in an event at the games, what’s important is that you participate. If you sing or dance well, or get a good score in an event, that’s great. But it’s far more important that you show up, join in and do your best. It’s expected and celebrated.

It’s about the springtime

Tom and I love music, so when we were in Greenland, we looked for music and tried to hear a variety. I enjoyed that and mentioned it to Kamp. From then on, whenever I saw him, he’d give me a CD or two—Greenlandic polka music, a well known pop artist, dueling throat singers. Always something new. I’d listen to the CDs and tell him which songs I particularly liked. Inevitably, I’d ask what a particular song was about. The answer was always the same—it’s about the springtime.

The first time I heard that, I thought, how nice. The second time, I rationalized, after a long, dark winter, spring must truly be a highlight. The third time—I knew something was up. It would take me several years before I found out what.

I used one of the songs I had asked Kamp about as a soundtrack for a rolling demo. The melody was beautiful and it seemed appropriate to use Greenlandic music. When another Greenlander saw my demo, he shook his head and told me my rolling was very beautiful, but that song... So I asked, what was wrong with the song? I was told it’s about a young man who loses his job, starts drinking and dies alone and broken. Seems like an odd choice to dance to. Got it. Definitely not about the springtime.

Do Not Touch

It was dinnertime after a long paddling day. Everyone was gathering to share the meal in a big room in a school. I was tired, dirty and cold. I was wearing a hat and wanted to keep it on, but when I looked around, I noticed no one

else was wearing a hat. I got concerned. Maybe it's rude to wear a hat inside? Maybe it's disrespectful somehow. I certainly wouldn't want to offend anyone, so I asked Kamp. He looked at me in total confusion. Then he started to laugh. He waved his hand like he was swatting a fly and said, "Americans." He said he didn't understand why Americans worried about such silly things. He said you should do what you want, and if someone has a problem with it, they will tell you. Simple.

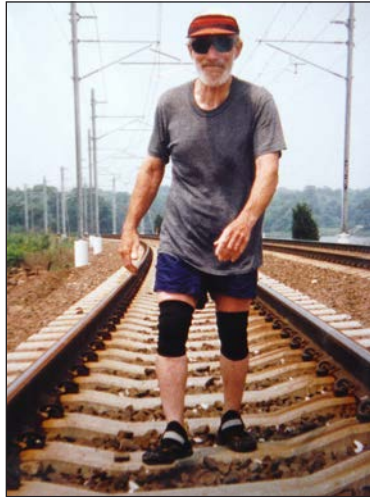
When he visited Washington, DC, a couple years later, he wanted to see the kayak Malilgaq built for the Smithsonian. It wasn't on display, but in storage. One of the museum curators agreed to pull it out so he could see it. The curator and an assistant brought it down and set it on the floor with a great deal of museum reverence. A big "Do Not Touch" sign was on the deck. As soon as it hit the floor, Kamp climbed in. He saw the sign. He understood it. He just thought it was silly, so he did what he wanted, and sat in the kayak. No one objected.

Roll, Roll, Roll Your Boat

I always try to donate a variety of items for the Delmarva Paddlers Retreat auction. One item was a bumper sticker with the popular song lyric and a graphic where the center "Roll" was inverted. Cute, clever, a nice ornament for any kayak roller's car. It was on the silent auction table and was getting some interest. Kamp, who HATED when anyone called a kayak a boat, walked up to the table, and with a Sharpie, corrected my sticker. It was instantly way more valuable, and a bidding war ensued.

I always cry at weddings

Many Delmarva regulars will remember Robin Morgan and Phil Ellis getting married on the water one year during the retreat. Pat Slavin made a beautiful wedding skirt for Robin's kayak, the wedding party paddled in processional, and Turner officiated. It was funny, beautiful and perfect. Everyone was awed and moved by the event, but none more than Kamp who cried freely and openly. It wasn't the first, or the last time I saw Kamp cry. But what really impressed me was how free and accepting he was of his emotions and how completely unselfconscious he was about expressing them. He was honest, authentic and wonderful. He will be missed.



Bobby Curtis: Kayaker, builder, Masik Editor **He learned a lot, he gave a lot back** **By Nick Schade**

Interest in Greenland style kayaking hit its stride in the early days of the new millennia, and the heart of that interest was embodied by folks like Bobby Curtis.

Robert Lester Curtis (Bobby) died last year, November 10, 2019. Bobby was born in New Britain, June 26, 1938, the son of Lester G. Curtis and Edith Rittner. After graduating high school in 1956, he served two years in the US Army in Germany before attending the University of Bridgeport. For over 30 years, he was employed as an engineer for the Perkin-Elmer Corporation in Norwalk, Connecticut.

Bobby took an early retirement to pursue his interest in sea kayaking. He loved paddling in the ocean. I'm not sure when I met him, but it was likely through ConnYak, a Connecticut based sea kayaking club that started in the mid 1990s. He was a small man, with white hair pulled back in a ponytail. He was making his own kayaks in part because there were not many boats that fit his size, and he determined he could make something more suitable himself.

Every winter for nine years he built himself a new kayak, typically stitch and glue or strip built. A little Jotul wood stove provided the heat in his workshop, and there was a cat curled up nearby. He sold or bartered his plans under the name, "Sea Spirit Kayaks." His website (still online as of this writing) showed the steps in the construction process. He had customers from as far away as New Zealand.

Bobby was the first editor of *The Masik*, serving in that role from Spring of 2003 until Fall of 2005. Reading his "Editor's Corner" thoughts show Bobby to be a typical kayaking enthusiast, excited to be learning new techniques and happy to have a community that shared his interests.

The first words on the first issue were his: "Editing the first issue of *The Masik* has been a worthwhile undertaking. I have discovered there exists within Qajaq USA a diverse source of individuals available to garner material for publication, as evidenced by the variety of material submitted for this first issue."

Bobby was an exemplar of that community of individuals. He learned a lot from the Qajaq USA community and in turn gave a lot back to it. For example, "Learning to roll has been a somewhat long and arduous path for me," he wrote. "My body and mind were not always in agreement whenever I capsized willingly. My mind immediately reacted by instructing my body to upright itself, while my body fought back to allow time for me to right myself with the rolling technique I was working on. My mind, however, more often gained the upper hand and I had to come out of my kayak. In time though, and with a lot of help from many people, and many hours practicing alone, my mind finally lost its grip over my body most of the time."

At that time Qajaq USA was a tight community of individuals, doing their own thing together. In the Winter 2004 issue he wrote: "While the US economy has been propelled forward by a housing boom, it appears that Qajaq USA is being propelled forward by a kayak building and rolling boom. Many kayak builders are creating their own boats along the lines of the traditional craft that have been the mainstay through centuries past."

There was a sense then of a real movement of people becoming interested in Greenland style kayaking and kayak making. If you wanted information about Greenland style kayaking or kayak building in general, there were not a lot of resources. Anyone seeking information on the subject quickly found their way to the Qajaq USA bulletin board or

my *KayakForum.com* bulletin board. While the world-wide community of people interested in these topics was not large, it was tight. Online acquaintances made at this time continue on today. The resources available now are more diverse, and as a consequence, more diffuse.

As Greenland style has become a bit more mainstream in sea kayaking, and there are more sources of information, there is a feeling that the community is disbursing. We no longer have to gather at the one place where we can find information. Now, with Facebook, Instagram and YouTube there are other venues beyond the BBS at *www.qajaqusa.org* for eager folks new to the scene to learn kayak building and skin-on-frame and Greenland-style kayaking techniques.

Bobby and his participation in the Qajaq USA community and kayak building represented the epitome of what Qajaq USA has strived to achieve. Jay Babina remembers Bobby:

“The first person I ever saw paddling a kayak was Bobby Curtis, which was about 35 years ago. I waved him down from my boat and we became friends and paddling companions for many years. As you all know, you get addicted to kayaking very easily. The first person I ever saw using a Greenland paddle was Bobby Curtis. I remember trying it and very cautiously trying a roll. Out of fear I over snapped and almost went over to the other side. I was addicted once again.”

Bobby loved kayaking and worked at sharing and extending that love of kayaking with others. He made an impact on sea kayaking and Greenland style kayaking by generously giving his time and energy, through acting as an editor for *The Masik*, as well as being active with ConnYak (setting up their first website) and MASK (Metropolitan Area Sea Kayakers), and by sharing his skills and kayak designs with others.