

Wooden Canoe  
Heritage Association  
NORTHWEST CHAPTER

Website

<http://www.geocities.com/nwwoodencanoe/>  
Newsletter June 2007

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News Flash, This spring the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation on TV and radio solicited nationwide entries to select "The Seven Wonders of Canada". Over 20,000 submissions were received and a million votes were cast across the country. From the original 20,000, final selections were made down to 52, down to 15, then down to 7. The Seven Wonders selected on Thursday, June 7, 2007 were: Prairie Skies, the Rockies, the Igloo, Pier 21, Old Quebec, Niagara Falls - AND THE CANOE .

Well, somehow, we always knew our Chapter was on the right track.....

## **Spring Rendezvous May 4,5,6, 2007 at Lake Samish, Bellingham WA**

Springtime in the Northwest, a little rain, a little fog and a little sun that makes it all worthwhile and perfect canoeing weather.

This meet was attended by some 50 members and guests. The lawn was lined with about 30 craft ranging from brand new and newly restored canoes to many solid work-horses that look like they are used often for the purpose for which they were built. There were several crying out to be taken home and restored to their original beauty and one little Penn Yan row boat half as long and almost twice as wide as a standard canoe.

The Friday arrival tradition is always a fun exercise to watch, as necks are craned at the sound of each arriving vehicle. Eyes quickly scan the racks. What's on top ? Anything new ? What did Dick Cross bring this time ? The candy store of colors grows as each canoe is unloaded with the help of old and new friends, and placed on the wide lawn, placed with enough room between for the steady foot traffic of admirers. After check-in on Friday, many paddlers hit the water to try out new canoes or get reacquainted with old reliables.

Frank Gunness described the trials and tribulations of birchbark canoe building on the West Coast. Frank offered an entertaining blend of humor and valuable tips for undertaking the building of this ancient craft. His description of 21st century man, digging for spruce roots with pre-bronze age instruments produced appreciative chuckles among the audience, (appreciative that Frank, not they, had to do the digging). The result was a beautiful canoe that looked one with the water.

This led into a presentation by Alexandra Bowers and Robert Schuweiler of stories from the lives of Voyageurs. Research by Alexandra produced slides of period paintings of the lives (and deaths) of these supermen of the northwoods.

Dawn Patrol was well attended, and the lake was cooperative with smooth water and atmospheric mist.

Before Ray Arcand's presentation, he passed out blanks to interested competitors for the paddle carving contest. The mood of the meet changed quickly from a happy reunion of like-minded paddlers, to a blood-thirsty and cutthroat mob, hunched over in defensive position, hiding their prize-winning endeavor from prying eyes. Wood chisels (and a little blood) littered the ground. After breakfast, Ray Arcand described his experience and techniques as a marathon and white water paddler in British Columbia. He showed us his collection of paddles, and introduced some of us to the graphite paddles that seemed feather-light. This got some members excited

about the upcoming auction, for which two graphite paddles were donated. Dick Cross shared his experience in stripping and finishing old canoes. A man who doesn't like to blow his own trumpet, he impressed the crowd with his knowledge, skill, patience and perfectionism when approaching each project.

After dinner the hardier and expert camp chefs prepared and shared their desserts using Dutch oven, reflector ovens or stove top. After dessert, Mike Monks, with help from Bill Paine and Red as good-natured hecklers, took the mantle of auctioneer, and proceeded to gather a very generous addition to the Chapter treasury with the sale of donated trash and treasure.

Larry Bowers of West Coast Canoes presented a very interesting film strip of a day in the life of a professional canoe builder, rated PG-13 for a little nudity and language.

Sunday breakfast was an amazing and. elegant extravaganza hosted by Robert and Ginny Schuweiler.

All held their breath as the winners of the Paddle-Carving Contest were announced. All participants were honored, and the winners were forgiven ..... until next spring.

We meet in the Fall at Manning Park B.C.  
Sue Cross



Photo by Ruth Hoth



Bill Payne and the newly restored Chapter Penn Yan. Beautiful work bill!



Frank Gunness describes the building of his birchbark



Thanks to Ruth Hoth and Mike Livdahl for photos.



Art Kleiner and his beautiful Rushton style 'Rob Roy' sailing canoe. Art would like to donate this canoe to our Chapter ..... wow!



Patrick Chapman, Steve Ellsworth and Eric Mast chat over the Penn Yan rowboat



Quiet waters

## **The Tree of Life for an Ancient Highway Part 4: The Woodpecker's Taboos**

Update: When we last left the tree it had been formed into a canoe shape by the Woodpecker's (AKA Carvers) and the help of a lot of steam. After an evening of cooling with the cover on the canoe it was carefully lifted by many willing hands and moved into the Comox Big House. The shade and coolness of having the craft indoors was necessary to prevent it from drying out too quickly after the steam spreading process.

Cradled upright on the sandy floor of the House the 2"x6" pieces of lumber used to maintain the spread were replaced, one at a time, with proper thwarts. These thwarts would also be the 'seats'. The thwarts were attached to the hull by friction and top and bottom blocks. Originally they would have been sewn through the hull. Once the six thwarts were in place the focus then turned to the outside ornamentation.

The symbols drawn and painted on the outside of the bow and stern were derived from the Comox peoples traditional legends. These included supernatural beings with the one created on the bow sporting a fierce looking set of teeth to 'eat the waves'. During this process it was discovered that 2 large cracks, each about 12 inches in length, had appeared near the bow and stern. The carvers knew there were certain taboos that had to be considered when creating a canoe. One of them was that a canoe carver must not brush his hair during this time.

One of the carvers in this case wore a 'cow hat' constantly to avoid this taboo. If they did brush their hair, they would find cracks in their canoe. The other taboo was that they were not to have sex or their canoe would suffer the same fate.

So with these two very obvious cracks in the hull, investigations were made. First they discovered that the cow hat had gone missing so the carver had to brush his hair. Then they realized that one of the carver's wives had come down from Fort Rupert for a visit, so that explained the second crack. What to do ?

A short journey was made by wood and canvas canoe to the North end of Denman Island in search of spruce root for the repairs. After scrambling and digging up and down the Camas Bluffs no roots were found, so it was off to the local chandlery. A heavily waxed synthetic cord was eventually found to be suitable for the sewing project.

Small holes were drilled through the hull about an inch to two inches and

parallel to the cracks. Then one of the carvers became a seamstress placing suture-like stitches across each crack for the full length. Originally pitch from spruce or fir would be coated on the cracks and stitches to waterproof the repair. In this case a little clear waterproof silicone did the trick.

Now that the problem was solved and not to be repeated, the carvers returned to painting the hull. The middle section of the hull was painted all black from gunwale to gunwale. Historically the hull would be blackened in this area with pitch torches to remove any slivers and harden the wood. Then it would be polished with dogfish skin which makes a fine sandpaper for finishing.

Finally the whole canoe was oiled with a warm mixture of boiled linseed oil and turpentine. Originally this was done with dogfish oil to increase the lifespan of the canoe. If used on a daily basis and taken care of out of the water they would last about 10 years

*Next: Paddles for the Pullers Barb Dobree*

A little while back, KANAWA, Canada's top paddling magazine asked its readers to select the "Seven Best Wicked Canoes". In the final choice, all were synthetic - not a single woodie.

NW Chapter member Bill Halliday of Comox, BC quickly set them straight. Here are extracts from Bill's letter to Kanawa.

"I enjoyed your 'Wicked Canoes' and the responses it elicited. In particular, I appreciated the manner in which the proponents shared their affection for their canoes of choice.

I do hope you are still entertaining responses, as I note that in over a dozen choices no one specifically nominated a classic wood/canvas model. Our continent still abounds with fine craftsmen and craftswomen who are assuring that this art form lives on. Although understandably expensive, their creations, as well as being beautiful, are still highly functional.

My search, like that of another of your respondents, ended in Quetico Country. There I discovered the Fletcher and determined it to be the ideal canoe for my leisurely re-explorations of the Voyageur Highway. Now hand-crafted by Thelma and Randy Cameron of Atikokan, on the Fletcher is a modification of the old Chestnut Prospector and, believe it or not, it actually enhances the hydrodynamics of the old favourite without sacrificing the classic materials.

My 17 ½ ft model, the 'Bill Mason Heavy Duty Special', was so named by

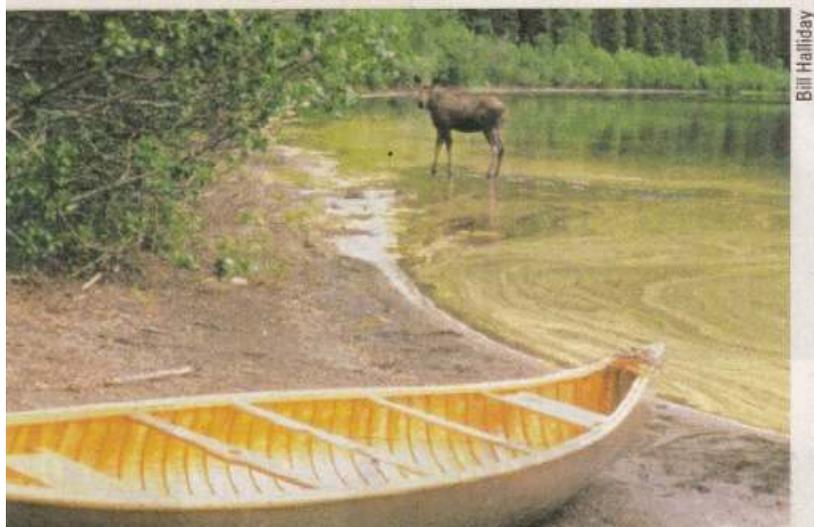
the master himself when he test-paddled it on Lac la Barge.

It was there that Paul Fletcher, a fabricator of aircraft bodies, began to build these canoes. First he designed and built a steel frame which facilitated more rocker and more tumblehome than was possible on the traditional metal-banded wooden frames used at the Chestnut and Peterborough factories. This makes the two Fletcher models even more maneuverable and yet also more stable than their famed predecessors.

The 17 ½ ft model clearly fits in your all-round category along with the other modifications of the beloved Prospector. However, it is particularly valuable as a 'big water' canoe. The clincher, when I test paddled it on Rainy Lake, was the security it provided in the big waves. The stability proved to be well worth the extra weight on the frequent portages down the historic Border Route.

The flip side of this sea worthiness is capacity. Randy mentions that my canoe could hold 'two big men and. a moose', but I prefer just one or two vegetarians plus gear and supplies so as to best enjoy the security of the resulting generous freeboard.

Enclosed is a shot of my Fletcher and a cow moose who was about to share the portage, but we were unable to convince her we were truly vegetarians."



This letter and photo were published in Kanawa. Paul Fletcher now resides in B.C. and is also on our NW Chapter roster. One day we hope to meet Bill and Paul and hear some more yarns. Ed.

## **WCHA Northwest Chapter Fall Meet Manning Park, BC September 14,15,16 2007**

### **Access**

On Highway 3, one hour East of Hope, BC or one hour West of Princeton, BC. Western border crossings would be Blaine, Lynden or Sumas and in the East, Nighthawk or Oroville. At Manning Park headquarters look for Group Campsite "Lone Duck 2" on Lightning Lakes.

### **Cost**

approx. \$5 per person per night

### **Schedule**

Friday	Noon onwards	Registration, set up camp and paddling
	7 pm	Talk and Demonstration of Spoon Carving. Ray Arcand
	8 pm	Campfire Sing-a-long Mike Monks
Saturday	7 am	Dawn Patrol on the lake
	10-11 am	"Steel and Flint" Fire starting Competition Larry Bowers
	2-3 pm	Canoeing Regatta Boudi van Oldenborgh
	6-7 pm	Community Pot-Luck Desserts
	7-8.30 pm	Auction Dwight Jacobson
	8.30 pm	Readings - Lies - Canoeing Yarns (4 minutes) round the Campfire. Bring along your favourite
Sunday	7 am	Dawn Patrol on the lake
	8.30 am	Paddle Carving Judging
	9 am	Board Meeting. All welcome

### **Remember To Bring**

.....Tent, R/V, food and canoe .....Items for Raffle and Auction

.....Firewood

.....A favourite dessert to share .....Your Flint & Steel fire starting kit .....

Warm jacket and toque.

We are at 4000 ft.