

# HISTORY

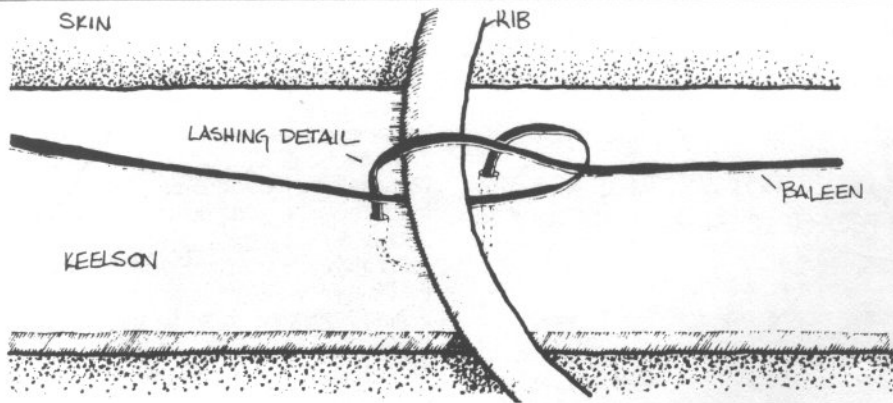


FIG. 13 — RIB/KEELSON LASHING DETAIL

**NOTE:** APPROX. 180 CM LONG SEAT STRINGER STRENGTHENS BOTTOM TO PREVENT SAGGING UNDER KAYAKER'S WEIGHT.

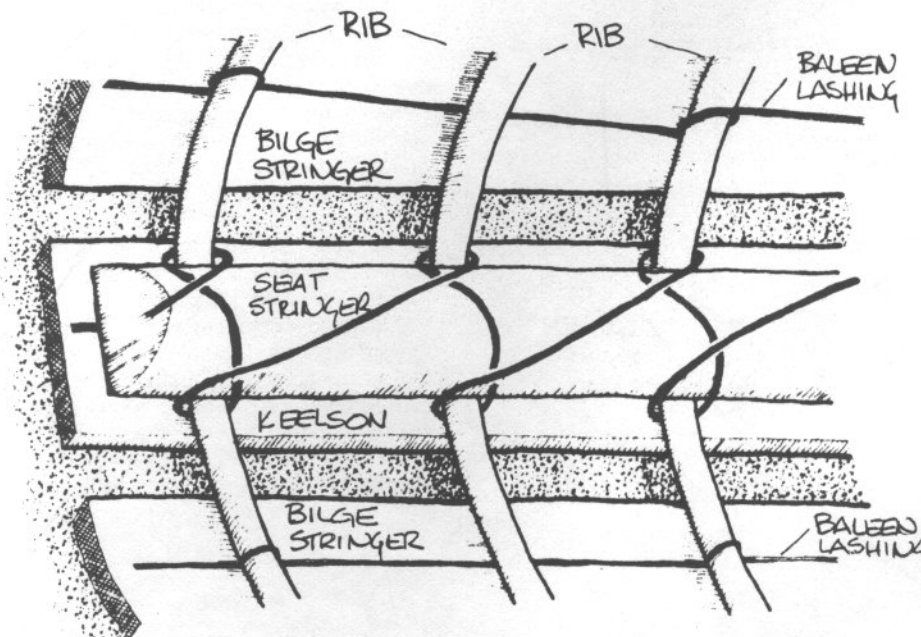


FIG. 14 — RIB/STRINGER, SEAT STRINGER/KEELSON LASHING DETAILS

kayak itself was sixteen to eighteen feet long, eighteen or nineteen inches wide, and about fourteen inches deep. The two harpoons were in their place on the foredeck.

When the kayak fleet first assembled, a file leader was chosen by the hunters. The file leader was singled out, whatever his age, by yelling his name. He it was who launched the first kayak in pursuit of the whales once they were among the shoals. The chosen hunter's kayak would be followed by a second, a third, and the others in succession. At the great whale hunts I remember there was such a large number of kayakers that when the first had long disappeared from view, more and more were just setting out.

During the season of the whale hunt, the men of Kitigariuit were always on the watch. They rose early, observing signs of fair weather and consulting over them. Some would stay on watch, eyes turned to the open sea until they discovered the belugas approaching the sandbars and shallows. Once the whales had disappeared among the shoals, the sentinels awoke their companions. Immediately a swarm of kayakers was launched. The hunters, paddling with all their might, drove their craft in pursuit of the whales.

Then, on the seaward side of the shallows, they faced the belugas and paddled forward all abreast. With loud shouts they struck the water with their paddles, splashing it in great cascades. Panic-stricken at the noise, the whales threw themselves on the sandbanks in their effort to flee. The largest soon had but two feet of water beneath them, and found it impossible to escape. The Inuit called, then, at the top of their voices, the name of the oldest hunter. The first shot was reserved for him. The old man chose a very large beluga, snatched a harpoon from its place on the fore deck of the kayak, and hurled it at his prey. Then all the hunters joined the slaughter. The trapped whales thrashed and lunged in the shallows, hurling spray that often nearly blinded the men in the kayakers.

strong, a surgeon with HMS Investigator in search of the Franklin Expedition, wrote about meeting some eastern Mackenzie Eskimos, two of whom were hoisted aboard in their kayaks, in 1857. In searching for a leak, one of the Eskimos emptied his kayak, giving Armstrong "...an opportunity of seeing how well they were stocked, including spare materials to repair any disaster that boat or implements might sustain." (p. 186) Later Armstrong reported that:

The owner of the leaky kayak, as soon as his countrywomen came on board, seized one of them and pointed out to her the hole in it. She immediately procured a needle from him, and thread of reindeer tendon; and, with great quickness and cheerfulness, set about the repair, which she quickly accomplished. (p. 188).

## KAYAK USE

One of the major uses of the Mackenzie kayak was in the communal whale hunt. A wonderful description of this was written by Nuligak who, having been born in 1895, was just old enough to remember the great event before his tribe was decimated by disease.

The kayak paddles bore designs in red, and the hunters' weapons were red as well. Each kayak was furnished with two harpoons of very slender wood, eight or nine feet long. To one of the harpoons was attached a kind of skin bottle, rather small and inflated with air. A long string was tied to the end of the second harpoon. A wooden disc, illiviark, was fastened to the middle of the string, and at the end was another skin bag, larger than that of the first harpoon, and embellished by eagle feathers. The

**To haul the whales back to camp, a sort of pipe was driven into their bodies or necks, and air was blown into the carcasses so they would float. A single man often had as many as five belugas in tow behind his kayak.**