

# THE PAAKALIK

## THE TWO-SEATER

### FROM HUDSON BAY'S BELCHER ISLANDS

BY DAVID ZIMMERLY

**T**HE BELCHER ISLANDS are off the east coast of Canada's Hudson Bay. Until the 1940s they were comparatively isolated, both geographically and culturally. The Eskimos that lived there used the normal one-hole kayak for a variety of purposes. What is especially interesting, however, is that they independently developed a two hole kayak. At the time of European contact, only the Aleut and Pacific Eskimo had craft with more than one hatch.

Anthropologist Milton Freeman studied kayak use in the Belcher Islands in 1959-1960. He indicated (1964) that the two-

hole kayak came into being sometime between 1942 and 1953.

Few Belcher Island kayaks of any type have been documented or collected by museums. A single-hole kayak in the Glenbow Museum in Calgary was collected in Great Whale River, but said to be of the Belcher Islands type. It measures just under 22' (670 cm) in length by 29" (73.7 cm) beam. Compare that to a one-hole one measured by Milton Freeman in 1959—16' 3.8" (497.8 cm) long by an even beamier 31" (78.7 cm). As for the two-hole Belcher Islands kayak seen in Figure 1, it

is, at 22' 2.5" (676.9 cm) long by 33.3" (84.5 cm) wide, one of the beamiest kayaks found anywhere in the Arctic.

A detailed study of the two-hole kayak was made in the 1960s by D. Lee Guemple (1967). The Guemple and Freeman articles together provide detailed descriptions and drawings of Belcher Islands kayak construction, use, transport, seamanship and accessories. They are available through the National Museums of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0M8.

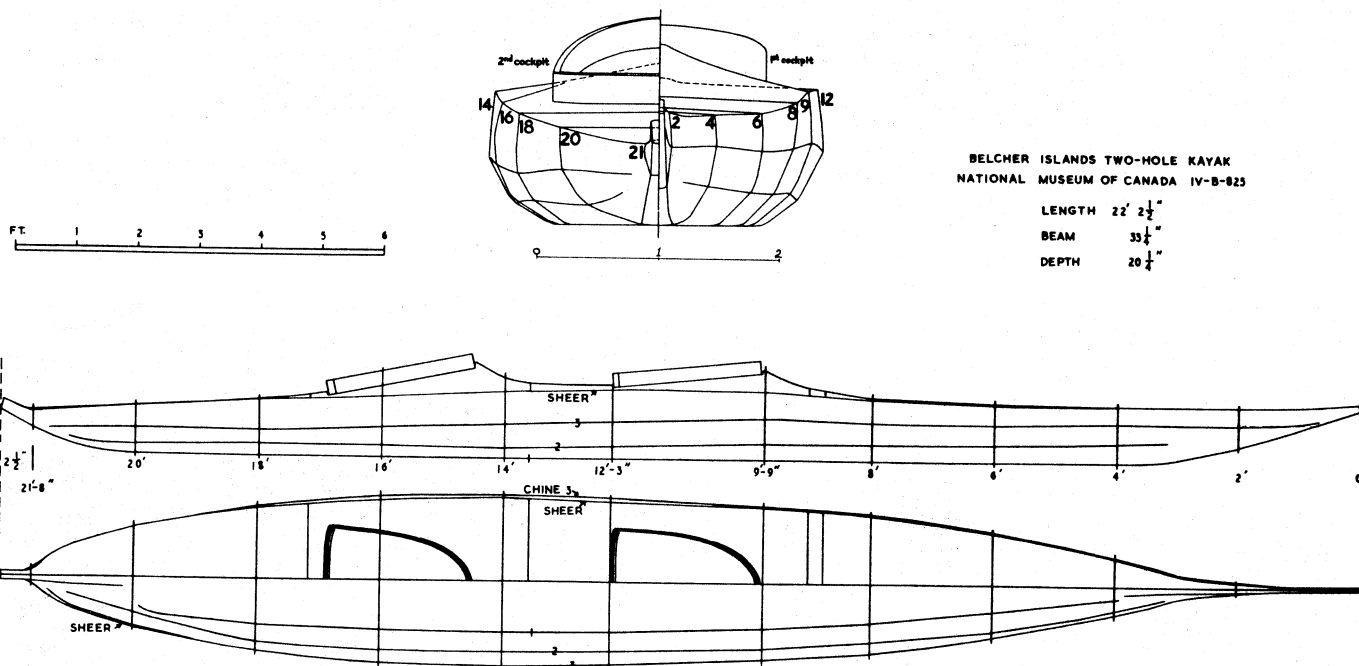


FIGURE 1: LINES OF A 22' 2.5" (676.9 CM) BELCHER ISLANDS TWO-HOLE KAYAK BUILT IN THE EARLY 1960S FOR THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CANADA. DRAWN BY EUGENE Y. ARIMA IN GUEMPLE 1967:130.

# HISTORY

## CONSTRUCTION

Kayaks were built and repaired in the spring. A frame could last five or six years. The construction of the two-hole kayak (details shown in Figure 2) followed the standard form. Gunwales were taken out of a large log and shaped. The fore and aft cockpit deckbeams were put in place and then the other deck beams added, followed by the fore and aft deck stringers.

The frame was turned over and ribs were bent and fitted into the gunwales (see Figure 3). Keelson, side stringers and bilge stringers completed the frame which was then covered with sealskin. The cockpit coamings were lashed on last as in Figure 4. The completed two-hole *paakalik* (literally: the one that has two cockpits) is shown in Figure 5.

## ACCESSORIES

Besides a long (9') double-bladed paddle, few kayak accessories survived the introduction of the rifle. A short (3') stabbing implement or harpoon was used to retrieve a mortally wounded or stunned seal. (It was not thrown). A knife was the only other hunting equipment carried by a Belcher Island kayak hunter apart from his rifle.

## USE

In the spring kayakers were little used—perhaps to tend a net placed in a river. Following sea-ice breakup in June or July, however, the kayak was used to great advantage in the hunting of seals, walrus and white whales. Sea-birds were seldom shot from kayaks.

Autumn saw less sea mammal hunting because of increasingly bad weather, but kayak fishing in lakes and near shore was profitable. Little kayak hunting was done in the winter except early on, when the boats were taken on sleds to the floe edge where they were useful in retrieving seals shot from the fast-ice.

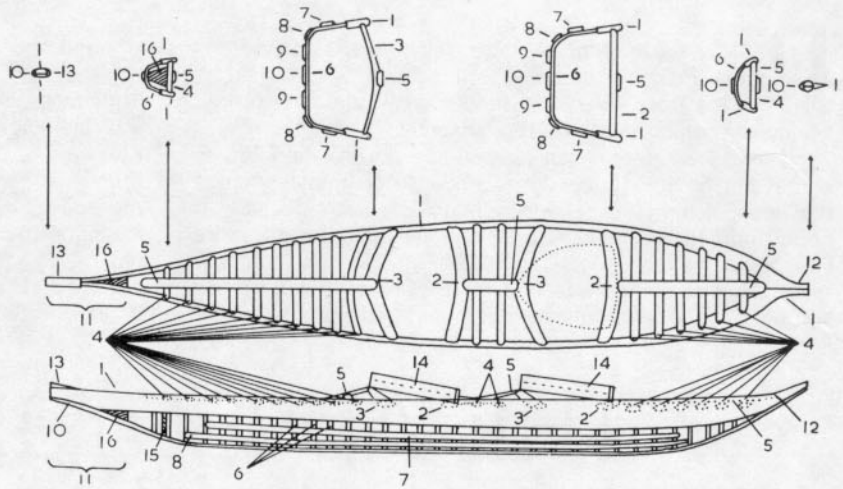


FIGURE 2: CONSTRUCTION DETAILS. HATCHED PARTS INDICATE OPTIONAL PIECES. DRAWN BY EUGENE ARIMA IN GUEMPLE 1967:137.



FIGURE 3: HULL RIBS ARE SOAKED IN BOILING WATER TO EASE BENDING.

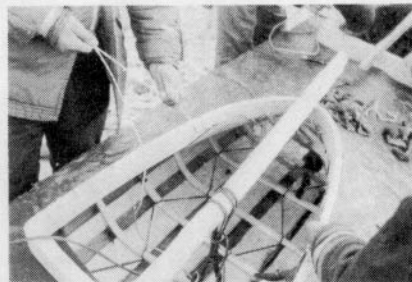


FIGURE 4: COCKPIT IS LASHED TO SKIN COVER.

## REFERENCES

Freeman, Milton M.R.  
1964 OBSERVATIONS ON THE KAYAK-COMPLEX, BELCHER ISLANDS, N.W.T. In Bulletin 194, pp. 56-91. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada.

Guemple, D. Lee  
1967 THE PACALIK KAYAK OF THE BELCHER ISLANDS. Contributed to Ethnology, V. Bulletin 204:124-163. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada.

A 41-page annotated bibliography of Arctic kayakers is available for \$8.00 US from David W. Zimmerly, 193 Holmwood Ave., Ottawa, Canada K1S 2P3. A free list of 20 Arctic kayak plans is also available.

David Zimmerly is an Ottawa-based Arctic Anthropologist consulting in museum micro-computer management systems.

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FIGURE 5: THE FINISHED KAYAK IS RAISED UP ON SUPPORTS WHERE DOGS CANNOT EAT THE SKIN COVER. THE LOG IN THE FOREGROUND IS OF THE TYPE SUITABLE FOR GUNWALE CONSTRUCTION.