

# THE EAST HUDSON BAY KAYAK

## A VARIANT FROM POVUNGNITUK

BY DAVID ZIMMERLY

**D**URING THE SUMMER OF 1976, Toronto's Ontario Science Centre held a Native Heritage Exhibition. In addition to Indian birchbark canoe and snowshoe-making, the live exhibit included demonstrations of various Canadian Inuit arts and crafts. A number of families from the northern Quebec communities of Inoucdjouac and Povungnituk flew down to Toronto for different parts of the summer, living in motels by night — and demonstrating lifestyle skills during the day.

A refrigerated trailer in back of the museum kept the group's supplies of Arctic char, caribou and ringed seals frozen until needed for food, boots (the term *mukluk* is a southern Alaskan Eskimo word meaning bearded seal — the material used for the soles of sealskin boots), or kayak coverings.

Several kayaks were made, covered with sealskin and launched in the Science Centre's fountain. In early September, exhibition coordinator Pat Fehely informed me that one more kayak would be built and I could document the process if I wished. So I did and, combining family vacation with my museum research, I spent several days filming and photographing Johnny Pov and his Inuit crew building the Povungnituk kayak illustrated here.

The 16' Povungnituk kayak is a beamy 29.5". Its length was accidentally determined by the Science Centre, which supplied Johnny Pov with 16' pine 1x8's for the gunwales. This makes this kayak the shortest of its type — which normally averages about 20' in length for a near 30" beam. A reproduction of an east arctic kayak that I made and use extensively is just under 21' in length.

Although short, this kayak is a worthy example of the flat-bottomed east arctic kayak. According to computer-derived calculations, kayaks of this type have greater stability than any other from the Arctic. Their angle of heel at capsizе ranges from 50 degrees up to just over 70 degrees. Their hull shape is such, however, that once capsized, they are as stable upside down as right side up. This points to the difficulty of using any of the standard paddle recovery techniques in the event of a capsize. In fact, most Canadian Eskimos had no means of capsizе recovery except from fellow kayakers.

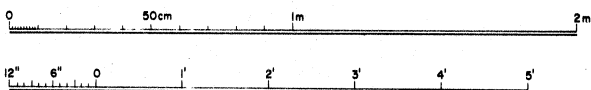
The Povungnituk kayak's cockpit coaming is high and highly raked — a design feature that keeps out most bow spray. The aft deck is and was the usual place to carry dead seals. With its decks awash, this little 16-footer can carry over 700 lbs. Part of the cost of all this stability

and carrying capacity is that the boat itself weighs in at 60 lbs., and others of the type are known to weigh up to 140 lbs.

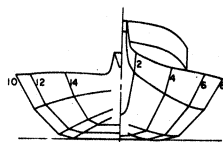
The east arctic kayak was mainly used to hunt sea mammals. Among the equipment needed for hunting, apart from the paddles, were harpoons of various weights and lengths, a sealskin float, an ice scraper, a bird spear, wound plugs (so a dead seal could be blown up with air to prevent its sinking while under tow), and many other specialized implements.

For use as a recreational sea kayak, the east arctic kayak feels immediately very stable in the water, carries a tremendous amount of camping gear and is just wonderful for poking around in rivers, lakes and coves. It handles waves like a champ and, despite its usual long length, will turn on a dime. Its weight makes it slightly sluggish, but once underway it needs very little paddling to keep going. I tank-tested my reproduction east arctic kayak with some amazing results; to sustain a speed of 5 knots required only 8 lbs. of continual paddle force.

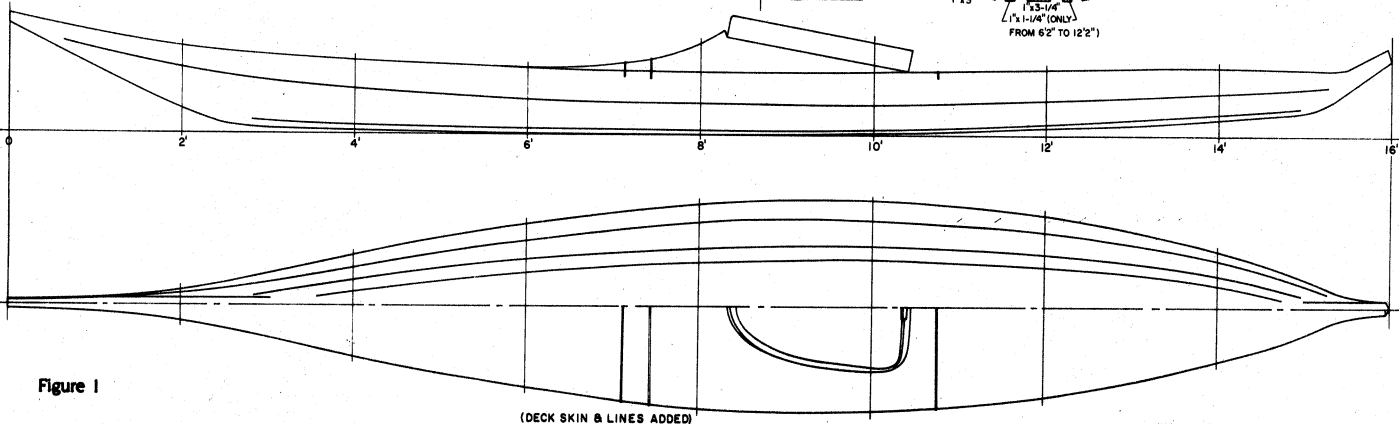
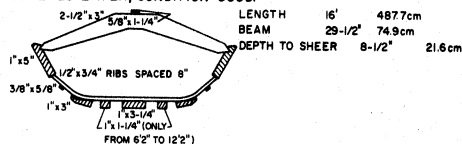
For day cruising I would probably choose something else, but, for long tripping, I like the solid feeling and carrying capacity of the east arctic kayak. It's time we built a few more of these boats, short ones and long ones alike.



KAYAK COLLECTED BY DAVID W. ZIMMERLY, WITH LINES TAKEN OFF BY EUGENE ARIMA.



POVUNGNITUK KAYAK  
ON LOAN TO NATIONAL MUSEUMS OF CANADA, OTTAWA,  
NMM ACCESSION NO. 77/22/1,  
FROM ONTARIO SCIENCE CENTRE, TORONTO,  
WHERE BUILT FOR DEMONSTRATION, 1976, SIGNED BY  
JOHNNY POV, ISAH SIVOARAPIK, ADAMIE PUTUGU, JOANNIE UGAIKUK,  
HALF COVERED LATER, CONDITION GOOD.



(DECK SKIN & LINES ADDED)

Figure 1