Guillemot?

Hand Made All Wood Kayak

Written by **Dan Whetzel**
Photography by **Lance C. Bell**
Construction photos by **Mike and Shelby Calhoun**

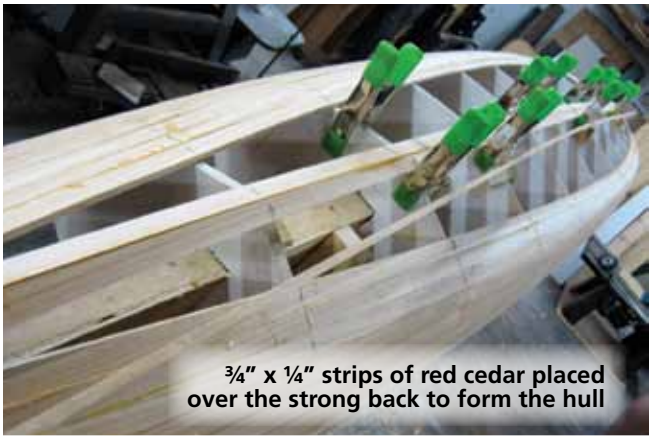
Kayaks have a long history in North America. Developed thousands of years ago by Arctic tribes such as the Eskimos, Inuits, and Aleuts, the vessels were primarily used for hunting sea animals and transporting goods. In fact, the term kayak means "hunter's boat." The indigenous peoples' design was later adopted by western Europeans who desired to build kayaks for recreational purposes. Cumberland resident Mike Calhoun's recent quest to build a kayak bridged both the indigenous and European traditions because he wanted to combine craftsmanship with the recreational aspects of kayaking on local lakes.

Mike's desire to build a kayak started several years ago when he read a magazine article about kayak building. As Mike recalled, "After reading the article, I started doing a little research on how to build one and finally settled on the Guillemot model."

The Guillemot was named after a sea bird and was designed by kayak enthusiast and entrepreneur Nick Schade who specializes in high performance sea vessels. Mr. Schade's background as a civil engineer with the United States Navy and on-the-water experience enabled him to author, The Strip-Built Sea Kayak, a handy reference book for craftsmen interested in building their own boats. Nick Schade's unique approach to kayak building involved the strip-built method of molding and fastening small wooden strips to the vessel's frame. The technique was well known to canoe builders but untested with kayaks until Schade's design became available.

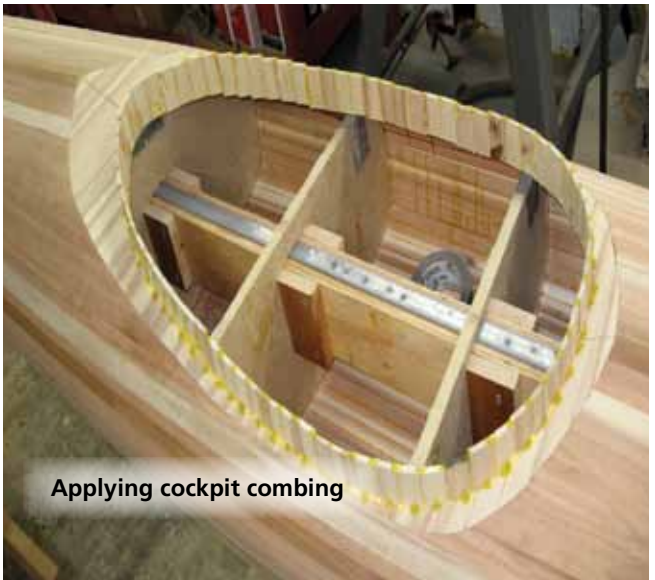
Research completed and Schade's book in hand, Mike began the process of acquiring wood and other materials for the project. Red Cedar, Redwood, Spanish Cedar, and Ash were the woods of choice. "I started with raw wood and then cut it down to one-quarter inch by three-quarter inch strips. For patterns and other supplies, I contacted Chesapeake Light Craft from Annapolis, Maryland, a company that specializes in boat kits."

The building process required skill and patience. "I stapled the first strip to the forms that were cut from a pattern. Next, I edge-glued the second strip to the first one and stapled it in place until it dried. Then I alternated back and forth until both sides of the hull were completed. The boat was flipped over and the deck was built the same way. After the deck and hull were finished, I planed and sanded the inside and outside until the surfaces were smooth. When the wood was smooth, a coating of epoxy resin was applied. After waiting 24 hours, the parts were covered with fiberglass cloth and wetted out with epoxy resin." After both inside and outside of the hull were coated with fiberglass, the hull and deck were fastened together with fiberglass tape. Cutting the hatches and cockpit completed the woodworking part of the enterprise. Mike estimated that 20 months and 400 to 500 hours of time were required to complete the craft that measured 17 feet in length and weighed 50 pounds.


¾" x ¼" strips of red cedar placed over the strong back to form the hull


Completed hull


Rough opening for cockpit


Applying cockpit combing

Final touches included multiple coats of varnish before the inaugural run on Lake Habeeb at Rocky Gap State Park during the summer of 2011. This summer Mike and wife Shelby will be enjoying the boat on other local lakes, including Savage River Reservoir.

Was the project worth the effort? "Yes, building the kayak was fun and I am planning to make a second one."


Starting to apply the epoxy resin


Laying out the fiberglass on the deck


Shelby and Mike with the completed kayak

Editor's note: Shelby is the Office Manager of Advertising Art Design, Inc. and Mountain Discoveries magazine.