

Title: The Aleutian Kayak

Subtitle: *Origins, Construction, and Use of the Traditional Seagoing Baidarka*

Author: Wolfgang Brinck

Publisher: Ragged Mountain Press, P.O. Box 220, Camden, ME 04843, USA

Published: 1995

Contents: 176 pp, softcover, illustrated throughout, index, glossary, reference list

Review: Peter Sullivan

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With a forward by the renowned skin kayak guru George Dyson, this book has to be OK? but - ho hum - I think the author started out with good intentions i.e. as the title suggests, how to build and use a baidarka, but somewhere along the way the plot was lost and the author finished up trying to explain the universe and all things in it, as seems to happen with a lot of kayak books.

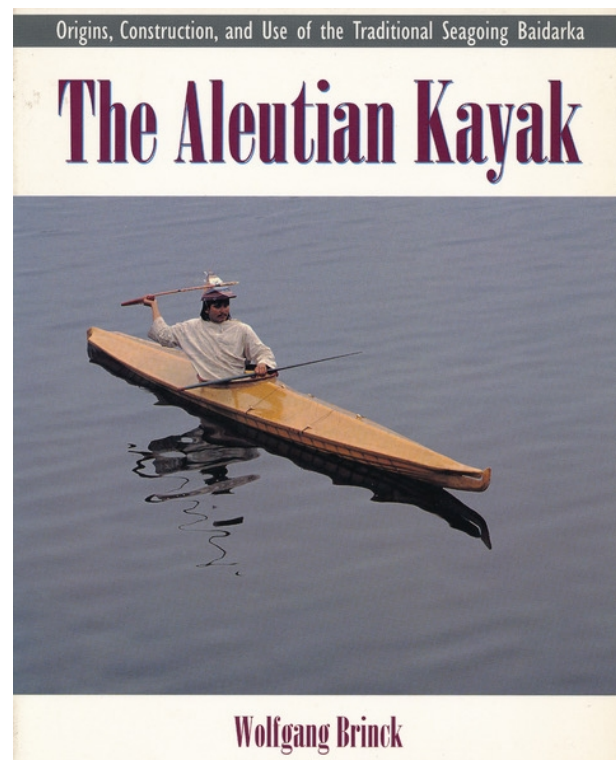
The book has 13 chapters which cover everything, (but not particularly well) from 'the nature of the boat' to 'using your boat'. Five appendices include Fixups and repairs, steam boxes and ribs, mortised deck beams, sails and rudders, and kayak dimensions and checklist. As a construction book I feel that the second and third of these should definitely be chapters or included in chapters, but seem to be add-ons. I say this particularly in view of the fact that three types of spokeshave and right and left hand crooked knives warrant serious discussion as well as photos, are included in one of the biggest chapters on tools and materials.

There's even a detailed chapter on making your own paddles using a piece of 221 cm x 8.2 cm (that's narrower than my hand) lumber (lovely word - lumber, sounds more exotic than wood eh?).

The book seems to be very disjointed and I was continually flicking from the chapter I was in to other areas to try and make sense of what was supposed to happen next. This could be a problem I own as I've always designed kayaks from the hull up whereas skin kayak construction starts at the gunwales and thwarts (i.e. the deck) with the hull layout done last.

The book is obviously aimed at the American market in terms of terminology: lumber sizes and types, and rudders tied on with bits of string.

The author uses extensive diagrams and photos which show excellent detail and if for no other reason, this book is definitely a must-have if you are contemplating building a skin kayak.



A quote from the book:

“Skin boats have more spirit than plastic boats. Objects reflect their creator’s spirit, which you impart to your boat as you work on it. The longer you work, the more spirit the boat will have. Plastic boats have very little spirit because the whole point of manufacturing is to keep costs down by minimizing human effort. At best, plastic boats will have very little spirit. At worst, they’ll have negative spirit, which comes from the boredom and hostility often found in factories. I’m not saying that you can’t improve a plastic boat’s spirit. As you paddle it, its spirit will develop, but I don’t think a plastic boat will ever match a handmade wooden boat in spirit no matter how much time you spend with it.”

There’s more but I think you get the idea and this is the guy who ties his rudders on with string.

I’ll leave the decision to read or otherwise in the comfort of a ‘spiritless’ but comfortably dry and warm plastic (GRP or fibreglass is also a plastic) kayak’s seat to the reader/s of this review.