

BUILDING AND USING A RANGELEY LAKES ROWBOAT

by Jim Byler

The upper right photo on this “Small Boat Forum” homepage shows a Rangeley Lakes Rowboat. The boat was photographed by Thom V. at the Lake Pend Oreille Rendezvous a few years ago. This is the story of that boat.

The Boat

The Rangeley was my first boat, built in my garage in Walnut Creek, California in the spring of 1979. My youngest brother had just built a boat, in his back yard as a student at Chico State, which inspired me to build one too. I happened upon John Gardener’s book “Building Classic Small Craft”, one of the few books available at the time on “modern” methods of build classic small boats. Fishing was my main interest in having a boat at the time, and Gardener had devoted an entire chapter to the Rangeley, making it clear that he regarded them highly. The design evolved in the Rangeley Lakes Region of Maine, where it was used for trout fishing. Plans for my boat, smaller than the usual Rangeley at 14' 7" by 40", came from Mystic Seaport Museum.

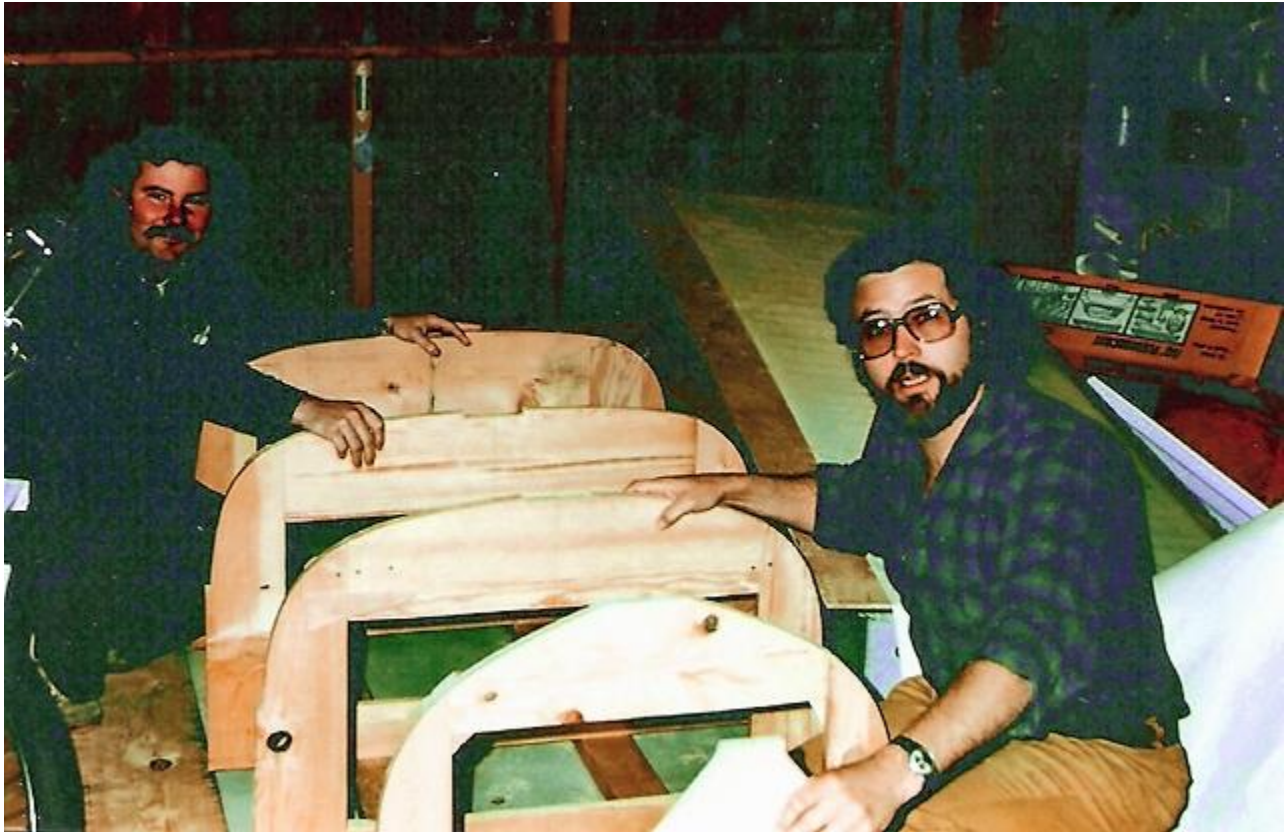


The photo shows my wife, Jo Ann, rowing the completed boat on Lake Pend Oreille in northern Idaho.

The Building Process

The boat was built upside down on a building ladder, following the Ashcroft or cold molding method construction. Cold molding consists of laying down narrow strips diagonally to the keel. John Gardener described the method in the appendix of "Building Classic Small Craft", using the fifteen foot Rangeley as an example. This method was recommended by Gardner as a good one for amateurs, which used relatively few tools.

The boat was lofted, and two sets of identical frames were made since the boat was a double - ender. The frames, shown here, were then set up on the building ladder.



Stems were added, and attached to an inner batten board or keel batten, which was set up on the frames temporarily, to come off with the boat when it was lifted off. Longitudinal strips of 3/8 by 3/4 inch Douglas-fir were also temporarily fastened to the molds, using headless nails. Planking, which consisted of two layers of one eighth inch western red cedar veneer strips, was laid diagonally to the keel batten.

A group of planks were fitted, and temporarily stapled in place. They were then removed, covered with thickened epoxy and stapled back down to the keel batten and longitudinal strips. When the first layer was complete, a second planking layer was fitted, glued and fastened diagonally to the first layer.



After sanding the outside of the hull, it was covered with four ounce fiberglass set in epoxy. The boat was removed from the mold, dried thoroughly (in the kitchen of our house thanks to my long suffering wife), and epoxied on the inside. It was then fitted with seats, gunwales, removable floor, and short decks, as described in the plans. The boat had three seats, front and rear to accommodate a rower and passenger and a middle seat for use as a single.



After using the boat for several years I removed the front and rear seats and added outrigger oarlocks. The seat removal lightened the boat for car topping. The outrigger oarlocks increased the distance between oar lock sockets from 40 to 46 inches, which is sufficiently wide for 8' oars. The modifications worked out very well for use by one person. I usually row by myself from the fixed center seat. When I carry a passenger I add temporary seats fore and aft and row in "reverse", with my feet sticking through the center seat, still using the outrigger oarlocks. I also built a removable sliding seat that I sometimes use with the existing oarlocks for single rowing.

Comment and Use

I found cold molding to be a good method for boat construction. Even though I was (and am) an amateur with regard to boat building, the project turned out very well. The planking was rather slow, due to the need to fit each piece of planking veneer to the previous one, and the need to pull the staples that were used to hold the planking strips down during the gluing process. Also, considerable sanding was needed to fair the hull. Nevertheless, I was able to do a credible job building a round bottomed boat, usually considered to be more difficult than other hull forms.

I have used the boat for lake fishing in several states where I have lived, first in northern California and later in western Montana, and now in northern Idaho. I enjoy trolling wet flies and nymphs for trout, and the boat is ideally suited for that. I can also stand and fly cast, either anchored or drifting, if I keep an eye out for powerboat wakes. It rows and tracks exceptionally well, and has reasonably good initial stability and very good seaworthiness. It easily handles as much rough water as I cared to be out in. I've felt safe enough with three adults in the boat, but it performs better with two and best with one. Its sweeping sheer line and high ends make it a very pretty boat, and it attracts attention wherever I go.

The boat has held up well over the years, with periodic application of additional layers of varnish. I have built several other boats since this one, mainly prams that I found to be more versatile. The prams are better for floating rivers (due mainly to their better maneuverability), more stable for standing to cast, and easier to anchor. But the Rangeley, a more specialized boat, is unexcelled in the use for which it was designed. I continue to use it for trout fishing in lakes, and it is the best boat that I own for fixed (or sliding) seat rowing, or just getting out on the water.

Thom V. apparently liked the boat too, as both he and the boat disappeared for several hours from the Pend Oreille Rendezvous. Upon returning, he told of rowing to a distant island and back. He has since bought a somewhat similar boat, an Adirondack Guide Boat. It might be interesting to compare them side-by-side.

