

Wilkinson's Canoes: The Odyssey of a Paddelhead

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Cleaned out the garage recently and found these canoes. Took them out on the lawn, dusted them off and took a few pictures before storing them away again.

The two pictures showing the group right side up are arranged in building order, from right to left. One of these is taken from a little higher up to show the interiors (below).



Number 1 is a David Hazen "Micmac" built in 1987 using 3/16" fir strips length 18' 2", weight 64#. Note the very red hue of the wood. This has nice sturgeon nose and a fair amount of rocker in the keel. We probably put close to 2000 miles on this boat, including about 100 miles strapped to a Cessna float plane.

Number 2 is a David Hazen "Abenaki". This was built with 3/16" cedar strips. Length 18' 8", weight 53# and no rocker in the keel. This is narrow, fast, and, with a round mid-section, very tender.

Number 3 is the first of a series of variations on Steven Killing's "Freedom 17". Length 17' 6", weight 53#, built with 3/16" cedar strips, the first one I built without using staples. This is a near perfect boat for day paddles or long trips. It's stable, fast, relatively light, tracks and turns well.

Number 4 is the one we took to Bowron Lake Circuit last year. Length 18' 6", weight 45#, 1/8" cedar strips and 4 oz. cloth. Maintains most of the good features of number 3, but is easier to carry, an inch narrower, but still pretty stable and probably a little faster. On the down side, it is somewhat more fragile.



Number 5 is the latest. Length 18' 6", weight 43.5# (it's 2 5/8" narrower than number 3), still used 1/8" strips and 4 oz. cloth as in number 4. Has all the good features of number 4, is a little lighter than number 4, is only marginally more tender than number 4 and is probably the fastest of the entire group. Like number 4 it is somewhat fragile, but a portager's dream.



Bottoms up in order of build -- right to left: #2, #1, #3, #5, and #4.

The picture of three decks shows from right to left, numbers 3, 4, & 5. Lighting wasn't that great, but you can see the really nice knotty walnut on #5.



I originally planned to have the new canoe (below) ready for the Murtle Lake trip, but retirement seemed to get in the way. I am sure If I had still been working I would have had the discipline to get it done by the July '04 deadline. After I retired, I had all the time in the world and took it. Actually, figured out we were away and traveling 5 out of the first 12 weeks after I retired... So *that's* my excuse.



At any rate, we launched the new boat in late September, and we love it. I think this is my final refinement of what started out as a Freedom 17, by Steven Killing. The canoe you saw on the Bowron Trip was stretched out to 18.5', narrowed by 2" and given a bit more tumblehome than the original Freedom 17. The
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new boat is still 18.5', with the extra tumblehome, but is narrowed another 1 5/8", so is a full 3 5/8" narrower than the original Freedom 17. To help preserve stability I also lowered the seats a little more in this one. The new boat is a little more tender than the last, but stiffens up enough when tipped to let you know where the edge of stability is. Weight on the new boat is 43.5#'s, 1.5#'s lighter than the last one. Again used 1/8" strips and 4 oz. cloth.



Here is a picture showing the christening (don't worry, we drank most of the champagne).

On the first time trials, Barbara and I got it up to 6 mph in neutral conditions. That's 0.1 mph faster than the previous fastest speed of 5.9 mph we achieved in a very extreme David Hazen Abenaki that I built in 1999. We use my GPS as the reference, so can't confirm the accuracy, but we thought it was pretty good for a couple of geezers. Mind you we can't maintain that pace, but can pretty easily top 5 mph for long enough to discourage most challengers. This is much like the last one with cherry rails and lifting handles, but I found some walnut boards with beautiful knots that I was able to split for the decks and bulk heads.

We named this one "Adam Lee" after our son.

