

All it takes to build a traditional Adirondack guideboat is a few thousand fastenings, a couple of hundred hours of time, and highly developed woodworking skills. And if you don't have the time or skills, you'd better have the patience. The waiting list for guideboats built the old-fashioned way is measured in years. If you're not interested in waiting your turn, there are a number of builders who have taken a fresh look at the appealing shape of the guideboat and created a craft with modern methods and materials that retains the character of the original. One of the most elegant is built by Steve Kaulback of Charlotte, Vermont.

An experienced carpenter, Kaulback was inspired to apply his skills to boatbuilding with the gift of a guideboat from his father-in-law. Kaulback now builds three guideboats a year following the lines of Rushton's Saranac Laker. "Rushton's boat had the finest entry of any guideboat," Kaulback says, "and information about its structure is readily available."

Nevertheless, Kaulback felt Rushton's design was more tender than need be, so he widened the bottom board to increase stability. While his initial intention was to build a strip-planked, ribless craft, he dismissed this idea because "ribs dramatically enhance the strength of the boat, and the idea strayed too far from the traditions of the Adirondack guideboat." His method of making the ribs is anything but traditional, though.

Kaulback rips spruce boards into 1/8-inch strips and places them in a steamer for up to 2 hours. The laminations are then shaped over a rib form and left for 1 to 1 1/2 weeks. Eventually, they are glued together with WEST SYSTEM epoxy and placed in the form to dry. This technique gives the wood a "lasting memory" and relieves the internal stress inherent in the wood. Unlike the half-ribs of the original guideboats, these ribs reach from gunwale to gunwale, improving overall



Kaulback's Saranac Laker

A Fresh Approach to a Classic Craft

by Deborah H. Janone
photographs by Carolyn Bates

strength.

Since Kaulback builds the ribs in double thickness, he is able to create identical ribs for both ends of the boat by ripping them down the middle. Secured in the jig, the ribs then provide the frame over which he strip-planks and edge-nails clear pine or basswood. In 3 1/2 working days, the hull is complete. Compared to the 250 hours and 2,000-4,000 fastenings required to construct a guideboat in the old style, Kaulback's are virtually instant boats.

Kaulback's attention to detail is apparent in all aspects of the finished product, including the variety of woods he uses. Seats, cleats and bottom boards are constructed of cherry wood; the remov-

able floorboards of marine-grade plywood or white pine; the oars of maple or cherry. He fits the decks with mahogany and walnut, while medallions of bird's-eye maple lend a personal signature to each of his boats. Each boat comes complete with a pair of hand-crafted, Adirondack-style pinned oarlocks, a solid basswood neck yoke, removable boards to keep gear dry, and silicone bronze fasteners and screws. In addition, Kaulback equips his boats with a delicate Adirondack sneak paddle specially sculpted for silent navigation.

Kaulback has won several awards for his work, including the H.I. Chapelle Award at the 1985 Antique and Classic Boat Show in Clayton, New York, for the individual best exemplifying Mr. Chapelle's love of small craft. Kathleen Ivimey, Guideboat Show Chairman for

the 1984 All-Guideboat Show in Saranac Lake, New York, noted: "Even traditional builders and owners who normally shun 'modern' craft were lavish in their praise of his skillful use of wood and superb finish."

Despite the artistic qualities of his boats, Kaulback wants his boats to be used. "I think the guideboat is the ultimate relationship of form to function," he says. And a functioning guideboat is exposed to rough landings, rot spores, roof racks, dryness, wetness, gasoline, and a thousand and one unforeseen collisions with the real world. A light skin of fiberglass wet out with epoxy provides the necessary protection. The boat can be finished bright with an ultraviolet-filter varnish, or the topsides can be painted. To those who turn their backs on such new-fangled materials, Kaulback points out that "materials and methods once thought to be radical eventually become

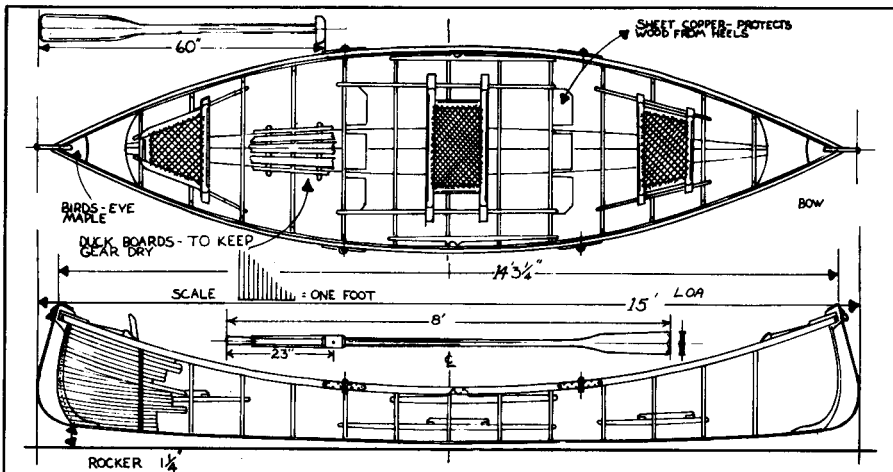
Updated Guideboat. Steve Kaulback strip-builds his guideboats, then finishes them in an appealing medley of woods, from walnut to bird's-eye maple.



Ripping Ribbs. Kaulback rip saws his laminated spruce ribs into matching pairs.

the norm. Preserving the history of traditional small craft is important, but it's just as important to provide for the future."

That's just what he had in mind in 1986 when he created a replica of his boat in fiberglass. While it may lack some of the appealing details of his all-wood model and is 5 pounds heavier, the mahogany-trimmed glass boat comes at an appealing price for those who appreciate traditional



Kaulback Guideboats	Length	Beam	Weight	Stem Height	Depth Amidships	Capacity	Price
Strip-built model	15'	38 $\frac{1}{4}$ "	68 lbs	23"	12"	650+lbs	\$4,200
Fiberglass model	15'	38 $\frac{1}{4}$ "	73 lbs	23"	12"	650+lbs	\$1,750

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looks and performance without a lot of maintenance.

Owners of Kaulback's boats are his most eloquent promoters. Betsy Parry of Bolton Landing, New York, says, "To row alone in one of Steve's boats is effortless. I can keep the boat trolling (for trout) for hours without complaint, and in heavy waters it cuts through and easily deflects the waves." Eric Chittenden of Waterbury

Center, Vermont, who has been navigating ocean liners for 24 years, bought the first of Kaulback's strip-built models. "It's fast, comfortable, light, and carries weight," he says. "Steve has improved on the quality of the guideboat." □

The Adirondack Guideboat, Steve Kaulback, PO Box 144, Charlotte, VT 05445. Phone: (802) 425-3926.