Why wood and canvas?

History

As a descendant of the birch bark canoe, wood and canvas canoes have their roots firmly in that tradition. Although the earliest documented account of these canoes is not until 1535, it is clear that birch bark canoes had been used in North America for much longer, probably thousands of years.

Birch bark canoes are a wondrous craft. To take materials readily available in the surrounding forest, and with hand tools create a lightweight, durable, robust and forgiving craft that can be paddled and carried by one person, over thousands of miles, is still one of humanity's greatest technological achievements.

When the sheer volume of European settlers in North America (fueled by the promise of land and the allure of the fur trade) confronted the ability of the local canoe building to collect enough bark and make enough canoes, the wood and canvas canoe was born. This technique incorporated an ingenious way to use readily available canvas on a rib instead of birch bark, and was coupled with an innovative method of construction that permanent canvas frames which could deal with the demands of increased production.

The fines of the first wood and canvas canoes heavily borrowed from the superbly functional designs of the local Indians and the construction methods were simply an extension of earlier skills. What evolved then, was a wonderful marriage of tried and tested design and methods, coupled with the advantages and fresh eyes that modernity brought to the problem.

Functionality

The word traditional often carries the unnecessary connotation of the repressive, as if things from the past can never match those of the present or future in functional prowess. We believe this is simply not the case.

In the canoe journeying tradition, wood and canvas canoes are every bit as practical as the most modern boats. The advantages of wood are numerous, light, durable, water resistant, comfortable, cheap and easy to the touch, not to mention beautiful. Canvas is also durable, strong, durable and lightweight. Our canoes are trimmed with local hardwoods, where we are simply spoiled with the UK's excellent selection and diversity. And because all these materials are collected with care, we stand by the Canoes for purpose.

The Rewards

The canoe for the Wood and Canvas Canoe tradition grows stronger, even still, when we examine it in the context of education.

Bill Mason once said: 'All my life people have been telling me that I should never travel alone, but...I have never been told that by anyone who has ever done it'.

Mason was a defender of self-reliance and experience and a wood and canvas canoe is a bastion in this view. Because these canoes require a little more care than plastic boats, we believe that they hone your skills and encourage good practice in a way that other canoe types may never do.

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