



# Wooden Canoe Heritage Association

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NORTHWEST CHAPTER

## Summer Newsletter      June 2025



*Canoes at the Lost Lake beach at the Spring Meet. Foreground: Heikkila H'aalt 20.5' racing canoe and Ebling 1947 OT Otca  
Norton photo*

**Beautiful weather, beautiful boats!** The Northwest Chapter had an interesting and enjoyable Spring Meet at YMCA Camp Bishop, in Shelton, WA, this May, with both familiar friends and new faces. Featured speakers presented a varied program, new and newly restored canoes were launched, and boaters aged 6 to 90+ enjoyed the lake! Does every Meet get better?! Plan now to be at the **Fall Meet at Manning Provincial Park, BC, September 18—21, 2025** and find out!



# Gray's Harbor CC Carpentry Class Visits Meet!



*Carpentry professor Adam Pratt helps fit students with PFD's and paddles. Livdahl photo*



*Vern Heikkila takes a crew of Gray's Harbor college students out in the War Canoe. Livdahl photo*

The Gray's Harbor Community College Carpentry class has long been associated with Camp Bishop projects, most recently being substantially involved in the construction of the camp's beautiful new canoe house. Now, the class doing much of that work is graduating in June, or has already graduated. This Meet, class instructors Adam Pratt and assistant Kelly Williams brought 20 of their new class of students on a field trip to visit the canoe house, and enjoy the camp and the wooden canoes. Graduating carpentry student Susannah Ebling was also at the Meet, ready for the festive re-launch of the 1947 Old Town Otca that she has restored.

The class toured the canoe house, admiring the gracefully curved building designed by architect Will Foster, with old growth cedar wood from a log from the Middleton family, and built to withstand any natural phenomena. Students admired the glossy canoes on the beach, and Vern Heikkila took them on a tour of Lost Lake in the 1947 War Canoe that summers at Camp Bishop. Owned by the Aberdeen Museum, the War Canoe was purchased by Gray's Harbor County Red Cross, and used for years in water safety programs. The students made a lively crew, and enjoyed their time at the Meet. Several stayed on for the night and events through the weekend. Welcome, young wood workers!

## Canoeing the Green River! notes on presentation by Jon Hockersmith



*Jon Hockersmith shows the route of his recent Green River trip. Livdahl photo*

On Friday afternoon, Jon Hockersmith took the group on a virtual Green River trip, with scenic photos of his recent solo trip in March. Spring and fall are the best times to canoe the Green, due to low water, hot temperatures and crowds in the summer. His 70+ mile trip was from Ruby Ranch to the Colorado River confluence; other popular put-ins include Green River State Park, and Mineral Bottom. For his trip both a BLM permit, and a Canyonlands National Park permit were required. Numerous outfitters in the area provide a range of packages, from shuttle service to various length full-service trips. Jon engaged an outfitter for shuttle service to the Ruby Ranch put-in with pick-up at the trip's end..

There are no designated campsites on the river, and as yet, no quotas. Leave No Trace camping is strictly enforced: fire pans (required) and firewood must be packed in, and ashes removed. At least one gallon of water per person per day is needed; if filters are used, the water is so silty it must stand overnight to settle before filtering is done. All human waste must be packed out and properly disposed of in a designated labelled container. Jon recommends obtaining the toilet system and disposal service offered by outfitters. He also suggests tall neoprene boots for some soft muddy beaches.

Jon used his Kevlar Northstar canoe for the Class 1—2 trip. The river current averaged 4—5 miles/hour in March, and he typically travelled around 21 miles per day. Wind was sometimes an issue, making slower progress plus increased dust and sand. Invasive, drought tolerant



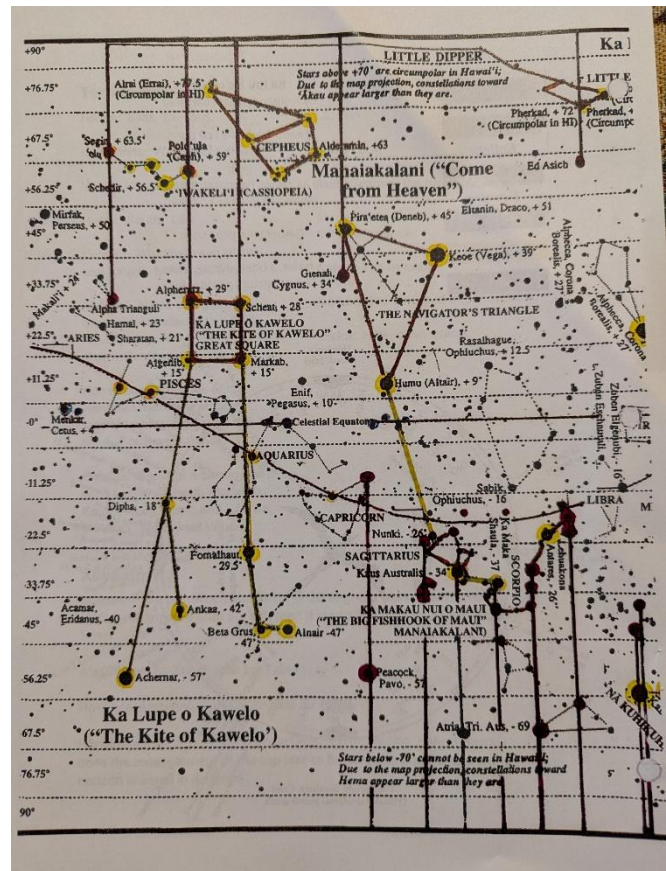
tamarisk (salt cedar) trees are spreading in the canyons, crowding out native vegetation and eliminating some campsites. He enjoyed viewing deer, numerous birds, and a large river otter plus the petroglyphs, dwellings and other signs of early habitation and exploration. At the confluence, he was picked up by a pre-arranged a jet boat shuttle service.

Jon recommended two complementary guidebooks: Belknap's Waterproof Canyonlands River Guide, and the Guide to Canyonlands National Park. These feature side canyon hikes, vistas, and historic spots: Anasazi petroglyphs and dwelling sites, John Wesley Powell exploration notes from the 1800's, remnants of uranium mining in the 1950's. Jon added personal notes to the guide maps for future trips, including geocaches, good camping spots and sites to revisit. Thank you, Jon, for an inspiring talk!

## Ancient Wayfinding! notes on talk by Kimimi Papp



Kimimi Papp describes the Wayfinding Star Compass, and navigating with wind, waves and bird and fish movements. Livdahl photo



Important navigational star formations for northern hemisphere navigators, with their Hawaiian names.

Kimimi Papp is from a canoeing family, and interested in her Quinault/Hawaiian heritage from an early age. She is a Quinault language instructor, and recently was able to attend Ho'omoana, a 10 day class in Palau on traditional ocean wayfinding that links many Pacific



*Kimimi Papp plans a Pacific ocean trip in one of the voyaging canoes next year.*



*65' double-hulled Hokule'a sailed from Hawaii to Tahiti in 1976, proving the capabilities of traditional wayfinding. She has made 15 ocean crossings, and celebrates her 50th anniversary this year.*

Island voyaging cultures. Friday evening, she discussed her experiences with large canoe ocean voyaging at the Palau class, involving the Micronesian Voyaging Society [www.micronesiavoyagingsociety.org](http://www.micronesiavoyagingsociety.org), the Hawaiian Outrigger Canoe Voyaging Society [www.wearevoyagers.org](http://www.wearevoyagers.org), and the Polynesian Voyaging Society, [hokulea.com](http://hokulea.com).

Traditional navigation methods, transmitted orally from navigator to navigator, were almost lost after some 2000 years of use by Pacific Island voyagers, as none of the double-hulled large voyaging canoes have existed for the past 600 years until recently. Interest in instrument-free navigation began again with the building of the first modern large double-hulled voyaging canoe Hokule'a in Hawaii in the 1970's. Navigator of that canoe, Mau Pialug, from the Micronesian island of Satawal, travelled to Hawaii in 1976 to guide the canoe to Tahiti without modern instrumentation. In further voyages, he mentored Hawaiian navigator Nainoa Thompson, and Mau's own son, Sesario Sewralur, of Palau. Kimimi studied under present Master Navigator Sesario, in her training in Pilau.

Currently, Hokule'a is celebrating 50 years of open ocean voyaging. The canoe has sister ships, 72' Hikianalia, based in Hawaii, used for teaching and training trips, and in Pilau, the Alingano Maisu, under Captain Sesario, used as a floating classroom for Pilau Community College. The Alingano Maisu is preparing for a 2026 Micronesian voyage, and a 2027 trip from Pilau to Hawaii.

Traditional ocean navigation is dependent on extremely detailed observation of sun and star position, winds, waves and currents, ocean swells, and the actions of fish and birds. The Star Compass is a mental construct in which rising and setting star formations are remembered for specific locations and times of year, based on a 32-division horizon for that location in the relevant hemisphere. Into the Star Compass, prevailing winds, currents and wave actions must



be learned and factored for a trip. Travel involves setting a reference course, preferably upwind if possible. Knowing ones' position in regard to the reference course involves carefully tracking daily distance and direction, and utilizing the relevant Star Compass to determine east, west and north and south positions. Finally, near the general destination area ("the box"), finer locations are determined to find land by observation of ocean swells, currents, and actions of birds and fish. Navigation is passed orally to interested students, and takes years of experience to learn well.

Kimimi's studies included the Star Compass and how to use it, moon phases, maintenance of the large canoes, canoe protocol, and plants for voyaging and their cultivation. The voyaging revival has also led an exciting revival of canoeing and travel protocol, chants, music and culture. Best wishes to Kimimi in her studies, and future voyaging trips! We hope to hear more of her experiences in the future!



*Hokule'a sailing near Hawaii. The large canoe visited Seattle in 2023, as part of local tribal canoe journeys.*



## The New WCHA Magazine notes on talk by Chris Eden

**Chris Eden**, editor of the WCHA magazine, *Wooden Canoe*, gave an inside look at the magazine and its evolution, with the group Friday evening. Chris previously worked on *Rudder* magazine, and for 25 years edited the magazine *Antique and Classic Boats*. For the past several years, he has edited *Wooden Canoe* for the WCHA, and is looking forward to sharing that responsibility with good friend, past WCHA president Michael Grace. Chris will be the creative editor, and Michael will be the content editor.

Chris discussed the changes many of the audience have enthusiastically noticed in the magazine as Chris worked to meet the expectations of a discriminating readership. Publishing the magazine four times per year (rather than 6 times) has enabled both higher quality articles, and more articles per issue. Reorganizing the departments in the magazine has added whimsy and allowed focus on the personal connection to canoes, with articles of more general interest than chapter activity reports. This can cover a range of subjects, from images of canoes, experiences with canoes, and features on individual makers. The photography and graphic design used—the visual integrity of the magazine—is of highest importance to Chris.

The Northwest Chapter has been well represented in the *Wooden Canoe*, with a recent issue featuring Willets canoes, and “The Art of the Canoe” using Mike Livdahl’s photos from Manning Park. Other articles, such as the recently featured little known 1920’s canoe art of famous English race-horse painter Sir Alfred James Munning, illustrate Chris’s goal, to “achieve richness without being slick.”

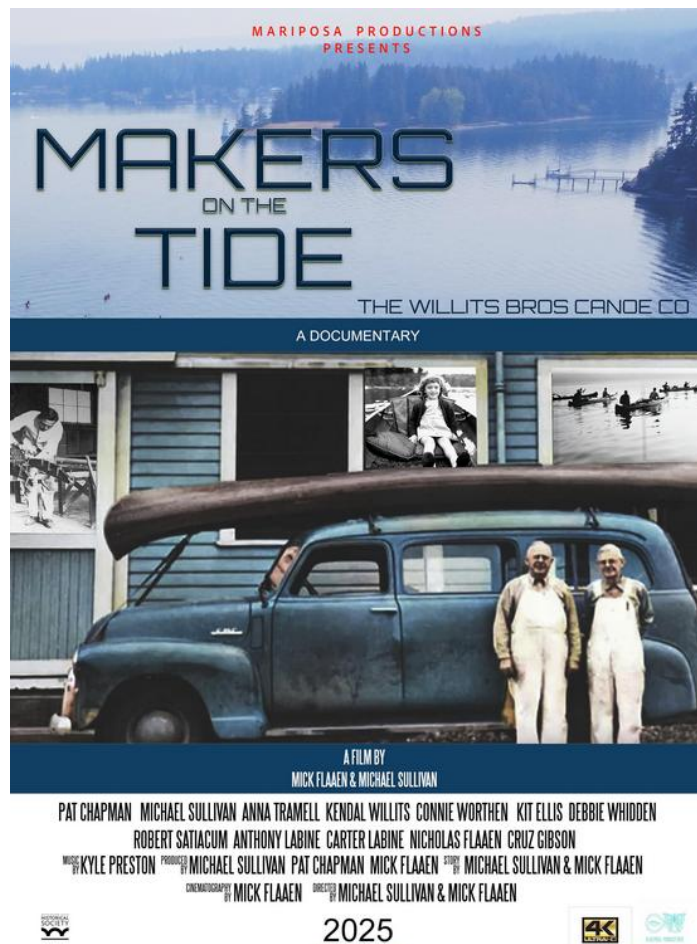
With Chris's attention to detail, broad interests and high standards for visual integrity, *Wooden Canoe* seems in good hands. We look forward to future issues!

Chris also discussed some of his personal projects and his shop, Back Alley Canoe Works, in Anacortes. The canoe he brought to the Meet, a gift for son Tristan, was an immaculately finished new canoe built on a 1915 Old Town Charles River form, incorporating mahogany trim from wood from the Willits shop. Other projects include the restoration of a 1924 Charles River canoe, and creating a new 16' Morris from a 1908 17' Morris form, by removing the middle section of the form! Hopefully we will see these canoes at future Meets!

## “Makers on the Tide”: Willits Canoe Movie



*Willits historian and restoration expert Pat Chapman was integral to the production of the documentary movie. Livdahl photo*



Pat Chapman arranged that the chapter could preview the new documentary “Makers on the Tide”, about the history of the Willits Brothers Canoe Company. Friday evening, the group gathered to see the long-awaited movie.



When, after 55 years, the recent decision was made by the Willits family to sell the canoe shop property, the subsequent “opening” of the canoe shop, the donation of the shop contents to the Foss Waterway Seaport Museum in Tacoma, and the donation of business records to the Tacoma Public Library all happened quickly. The wooden canoe world suddenly had a long-awaited glimpse into the magical shop that produced the “Stradivarius of canoes.” “Makers on the Tides,” produced by UW historian Michael Sullivan, film maker Mick Flaaen, and Willits historian Pat Chapman, captures the remarkable story of Earl and Floyd Willits, with historic photos, strategic interviews, and beautiful views of lovely Willits canoes in their home waters today.

The film begins in the misty past, with a Northwest tribal story narrated by Puyallup environmental activist Robert Satiacum Jr. A canoe carver is missing, lost to the sky world. The unique skills of many animals are needed to create the ladder to the sky world needed to find him and bring him home. The movie follows the Willits family from the Midwest to the brothers’ high school days in Tacoma, where they took wood shop, metal shop and mechanical drawing classes and were already beginning their canoe business partnership. Details of the growing business and the brothers’ meticulous standards of craftsmanship are narrated by family member Kendal Willits, Pat Chapman, and collection representatives of the Tacoma Library and Foss Waterway Seaport. While some might wish more focus on the brothers’ processes and unique inventions, the movie is a worthy tribute to this remarkable pair of craftsmen and their beautiful canoes.

Thank you, Pat, for giving us the opportunity to see this movie!



*Steve and Joan Ellsworth's 1921 Willits # 8C89 shows the precise placement of some of its 7,000 copper tacks! Livdahl photo*

## Meet the Canoes!

An array of beautiful canoes lined the Lost Lake beach when the group gathered to “Meet the Canoes” on Saturday morning. Vern and Jan Heikkila brought the 20.5’ H’ault solo racing canoe Vern built from plans from the Duncan, BC First Nation. Jon and Sherry Hockersmith came with the light, sleek 15’ “Ami” Jon built at Stewart Boatworks. (See the article about Alex Comb of Stewart River Boatworks, and his quest for lighter canoes, in the Spring issue of *Wooden Canoe*.)

Martin Ferwerda brought his 1927 Old Town HW, fitted with a sliding seat rowing rig that also fits his larger Thompson canoes. His father had originally planned to restore the canoe, and had collected materials, and Martin did the actual restoration, replacing 5 ribs and some of the planking.



*Jim and Ruth Cullen's unusual Thompson, showing narrow light ribs and light built-in floorboards. Livdahl photo*



*Chris Eden's new canoe was built using a 1915 Old Town Charles River form. Norton photo*

Chris and Trish Eden showed the lovely new canoe Chris built for their son Tristan. The canoe has mahogany trim, with book-matched long mahogany decks using wood from the Willits shop, and sports a refurbished Old Town canoe seat from Ray Arcand's collection. Chris built a custom press to make the long decks. The canoe is finished in “Pirate Green” paint. Lucky Tristan!

Some of the canoes were familiar from previous Meets. Kurt and Laura Schmidt brought the 1917 Kennebec that had been his dad's restoration project, and Kurt completed the project years later, incorporating wood trim from family homesites. Vern Heikkila showed their flashy white 18' Old Town Guide, which, with 4 paddlers, nearly flies across the water. The Ellsworth's 1921 Willits has the unusual book-matched planking and slightly narrower beam which distinguishes it from later models. Mike Livdahl came with his Old Town Otca, in tough baidarka cloth obtained from Corey

Friedman. Mary and Joe brought the lovely but mysterious canoe won in a NW Chapter raffle



some years ago; group experts are unable to agree on its lineage. The Heikkilas brought the Aberdeen Museum's 1947 War Canoe, restored by Vern, which will live at Camp Bishop for the summer. With the War Canoe was "Huey", the 1930's Old Town Ideal in bright orange, also owned by the Aberdeen Museum—the last of the Red Cross water safety program canoes—also at Camp Bishop for the summer.



*Vern Heikkila discusses his long (20.5') and skinny (18" beam) H'Ault racing canoe, built from plans from that First Nation in BC. The canoe challenges paddlers and seems to encourage swimmers; it would be nice to see it at full speed! Livdahl photo*



*Finely worked inlays decorate the Edminster's strip canoe, and show off Robert's craftsmanship. Livdahl photo*







*Robert and JoAnn Edminster enjoy their beautifully finished strip canoe designed and built by Robert as a Covid project. He is currently restoring an older Old Town canoe.. Livdahl photo*



*Still teaching water safety after 78 years. Livdahl photo*

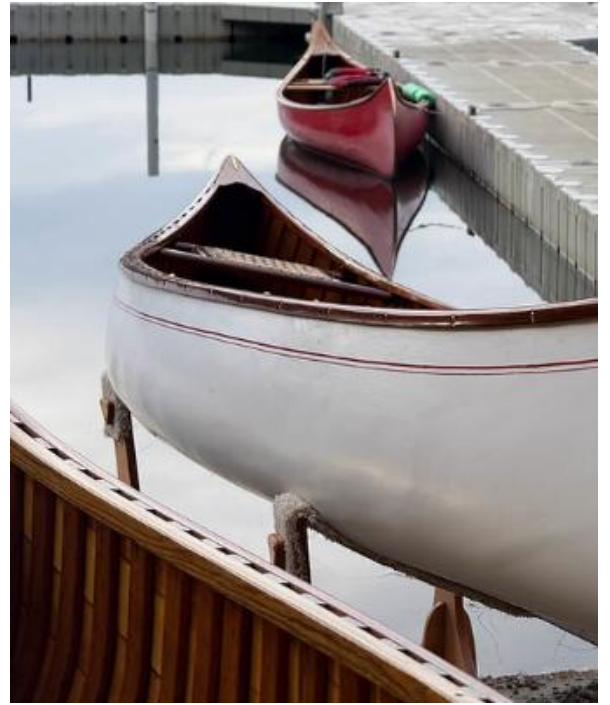


*Josh Fliegel single-hands the war canoe. Livdahl photo*





*The Cullins' unusual narrow-ribbed Thompson has curly maple thwarts added when restored by Ray Arcand in 2006 at Pender Island. Livdahl photo*



*Dick Cross showed two canoes obtained from Ray's collection from Beth Arcand and restored by Dick. This white Old Town 50 # shows Dick's trademark stylish pin stripes. The second canoe, a favorite solo canoe of Ray's, is a Peterborough, in bright yellow. Livdahl photo*



*"Meet the Canoes" group discusses the Peterborough canoe Dick Cross recently restored. The canoe was part of Ray Arcand's collection, and a favorite solo canoe.. Livdahl photo*



“Meet the Canoes” concluded with an exciting re-launch: Susannah Ebling and mentor Vern Heikkila discussed the restoration process of her 1945 Old Town Otca. Susannah, a recent graduate of the Gray’s Harbor Community College Carpentry program, first made a light, northwest paddle using old-growth cedar from scrap wood left over from the Canoe House project. A derelict canoe was contributed as a next project by Courtney Codrington, and Vern mentored Susannah in the work of re-building new stems, installing new ribs, planking and re-canvassing. Re-launched, the canoe floated beautifully, ready for new adventures.



*Susannah Ebling holds her cedar paddle with restoration mentor Vern Heikkila. Livdahl photo*



*...and the canoe is re-launched! Livdahl photo*



*Susannah and daughter Alliannah take a first paddle in the restored canoe! Livdahl photo*



# First Lessons in Freestyle Canoeing!



Jon Hockersmith shows freestyle strokes. Livdahl photo.

Jon Hockersmith became interested in freestyle, or “Canadian style” canoeing when he saw a freestyle performance by canoe designer Pat Moore. Later, at a WCHA Assembly, he attended a forum about it by Caleb Davis, and was so intrigued that he then spent a day with Caleb for lessons.

Jon demonstrated some of what he learned to an enthusiastic group Saturday morning. Jon paddled solo, although freestyle is also done as a tandem team.

First, with the solo paddler centered in the canoe, the canoe is leaned to its secondary stability point, with the gunwale just above the water. This changes the waterline shape of the canoe, and the paddler is at its pivot point.

Turns can be done with a sweep stroke, and sculling is used to draw

and push-away, with the recovery done underwater. A box stroke can also be used to go forward or circle. Jon recommends practice around another canoe or a buoy to learn and improve. Becky Mason videos are also helpful, as is the book *Freestyle Canoeing: Contemporary Paddling Technique*, by Glaros and Wilson.

In choosing equipment, Jon noted that a canoe with some rocker is better than a flat, long hull shape, and no keel maneuvers more easily than a keeled canoe. Some paddlers kneel, while others kneel onto a thwart or use a leather strap seat for support. Some make a moveable seat of a rectangular soft lunch container filled with cut-to-length pool noodles.

Jon made it all look easy. It was inspiring to watch him maneuver apparently effortlessly in his “Ami” canoe. Happily, for those attending Assembly in July, the Adirondack Freestyle Canoe Symposium is also booked at Paul Smith’s College at the same time, so amazing freestyle canoeing can be seen then! Thank you, Jon!

## Chapter Meeting!

A brief chapter meeting was called to order by President Mike Livdahl. To keep board members in proper term order, Kurt and Laura Schmidt and Jon Hockersmith were elected to 2 year terms, and Josh Fliegel, Sue Cross and Patra Moore were elected to 1 year terms.

Joan Ellsworth reported that we have \$6,666 in the treasury. She explained we try to keep at least two Meet's expenses in hand, and that we had voted to reserve \$1,000 to build a guest speaker/visiting national officer fund for a future Meet. The chapter voted to donate \$500 to the WCHA. Interest was expressed regarding a possible donation to a local youth-oriented program, such as the GHCC carpentry program. The group voted to consider such a donation in the Spring 2026, and Sue Cross will research local youth options.

The Chapter voted to return to Camp Bishop for the 2026 Spring Meet.

## Chapter Auction!

The chapter auction table, as usual, was an eclectic collection of curious items: a selection of tools, fine wine, honey, beautiful hand knits, WCHA magazines, lovely wooden flutes, used books and useful items. This time, several special items were included, warranting reserves placed on the items.

Pat Chapman donated a canoeing/small boats maritime library filling two boxes. Beth Arcand donated a pack basket of Ray's, and a small, scale model birchbark canoe made by long-time early chapter member Morris Elliott. What happened with these items seemed to show the real spirit of our generous NW Chapter.

Ray's pack basket was eagerly purchased to use, and enjoy especially because it was Ray's. Rather than sell the books one at a time, Courtney Codrington offered to buy all of them, with plans to donate most of them to Port Townsend's Northwest Maritime Center. He then gave Susannah Ebling a gift of the important canoe restoration reference books plus a paddle-making book to start her own canoe library! Dick Cross and Chris Eden had a spirited bidding war for the Morris Elliott model, with Chris finally topping Dick's bid, and then, presenting the little canoe to Dick as a gift! The auction earned \$1,132 for the chapter! Thank you, everyone!



*Auctioneer Kurt Schmidt, right, and assistant Jon Hockersmith inspired a high-bidding crowd. Livdahl photo*





*Dick Cross and Mike Livdahl Chris Eden photo*



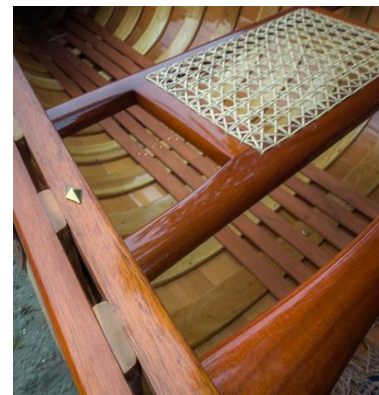
*Laura and Kurt Schmidt in Kennebec canoe. Livdahl photo*



*Martin Ferwerda shows sliding seat rowing unit in his Old Town Otca. Livdahl photo*



*Alli and Susannah Ebling in Old Town Otca. Livdahl photo*



*Detail of craftsmanship in Chris Eden's new Charles River canoe. Livdahl photo*





*Steve Ellsworth and Courtney Codrington visit the Bob and Patra Moore camp. Livdahl photo*



*Stephen Farmer's friend Donnie Kessack said he would teach him to fish at the Meet. Guess he's a good teacher! Livdahl photo*



*Charlie Farmer, Teddy Farmer, Alli Ebling and Carter Kessack enjoy the Meet. Livdahl photo*



*The Heikkila's 18' 1942 Old Town "Guide" Livdahl photo*



*Dick Cross, Sue Cross, Steve Ellsworth and Vern Heikkila return "Huey" to the canoe house. Livdahl photo*



Wooden Canoe Heritage Association  
**ASSEMBLY 2025**  
July 15-20



**MOTORIZED CANOES**





The NW Chapter surrounds Susannah Ebling's canoe! Kneeling: Joan and Steve Ellsworth with Ryder, Mary Norton and Joe McElroy with Duff and Sean, Alliannah and Susannah Ebling, Sue Cross. 2nd row: Trish Eden, Sherry Hockersmith, Courtney Codrington, Jim Cullins, Jan and Vern Heikkila, Ruth Cullins, Martin Ferwerda, Laura and Kurt Schmidt, Julie Beschla, Josh Fliegel, Kelly Williams. Back row: Mike Livdahl, Chris Eden, Dick Cross, Jon Hockersmith, Kiara Clifton, Tucker Stecher, Stephen Farmer, Charlie Farmer, Lin McElroy, Teddy Farmer. Not pictured: Robert and JoAnn Edminster, Donnie and Carter Kessack.

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See you at Manning Park, BC September 18—21, 2025!