



# Wooden Canoe Heritage Association

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NORTHWEST CHAPTER

## NW Chapter WCHA Winter Newsletter: November 2025



*Jim Ekins enjoys Dawn Patrol on Lightning Lake in Manning Park. Livdahl photo.*

Beautiful Manning! The NW Chapter enjoyed a memorable Fall Meet at Lightning Lake, in British Columbia's Manning Provincial Park September 17—21, 2025. With an interesting program, new and old friends, lovely canoes and fine weather (except for the last day): a good time for everyone. Even the change to Lone Duck Campground 1—up the hill, and away from the beach-- worked out well for the group. Canoe carts made the trip to the lake shore manageable; canoes stayed at the beach and were easily launched from there.

Thanks to all who made the Meet special: President Mike Livdahl, speakers Mike Elliott and Chris Cooper, treasurer Joan Ellsworth, auctioneers Mike Elliott and Kurt Schmidt, and everyone who helped set up tents, load and unload canoes, and move canoes up and down the hill. It was another great NW Chapter Meet!

## Fall Meet at Manning

This fall's NW Chapter Meet had some differences. First, the pre-Meet adventure trip to Chilko Lake was cancelled at the last moment because of heavy smoke and wildfires in the area. Equipped for camping with a week until the Meet, the Chilko Lake group separated to other scenic and interesting destinations. Barb and Chris Cooper and friends went east, touring British Columbia and Alberta provincial parks. Mike Livdahl and Jim Ekins headed north, to remote and windy Morice Lake. After many gravel road miles, the groups arrived at Manning for the Meet.

Thursday was a day for setting up camp, greeting friends, and moving canoes to the lakeshore from the hilltop campground. Friday, many of the chapter canoed down the lakes for lunch at the western beach.



*Morning paddle for a picnic lunch. Livdahl photo*



*Clear signs to Lone Duck # 1.  
L Livdahl photo*



*The narrow area between lakes was an actual short portage this year!  
Livdahl photo*



*Picnic lunch at the western end of Lightning Lakes. Cooper photo*





(Left): Chris Eden makes a cast from his 1921 Old Town Charles River. Livdahl photo. (Below) Jennifer Eastwood and Mike Elliott paddle his Chestnut. Livdahl photo



1Steve and Joan Ellsworth afloat in their Willits. Livdahl photo



K.Bill and Carol Clark with Annie, in their 1936 Otca. Livdahl photo



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Bob Needham paddles bow in Jim Ekins' long-time family canoe, a 1925 Otca. Livdahl photo



Haida Gwaii artist Bill Reid custom design showing a sea otter eating a sea urchin on Chris and Barb Cooper's strip canoe. The bow's other side is a custom salmon design. Livdahl photo

## Meet the Canoes

Saturday morning, everyone met at the lake shore to hear about the canoes. A variety of canoe builders were represented this year. Steve and Joan Ellsworth discussed their 1921 **Willits**, a slightly narrower version than their later standard canoe. Steve noted that at the time, the canoes sold for \$85, although their model, with the book-matched contrasting wood stripes, was \$115! Steve plans to re-do the inner varnish on this canoe.

Craig Dupler brought a **Chestnut** AA 50# canoe of uncertain age. It originally had sponsons, now removed, and was originally painted in two-tone style # 23. Craig does not plan to restore and replace the sponsons.

Chris Eden transformed his 1924 **Old Town Charles River**, bringing it back from extremely poor condition. The canoe had no outwales, or rib tops, and was almost considered hopeless. After 100 new rib tops, with new outwales, stringers below the inwales, in gleaming white, with each screw slot aligned—it looked like a work of art.

K. Bill and Carol Clark showed off their 1936 **Old Town Otca**. Originally used at a Girl Scout camp, the canoe was restored by them as a joint project. Bill had previous experience with Old Town canoes at a Wisconsin cottage.

Kurt and Laura Schmidt brought the **Kennebec** canoe purchased by his father in the 1940's for \$50. His father began the canoe's restoration in Wisconsin, but the project was sidelined by a busy life. Kurt began work on the canoe in 2011, then moved the family and canoe cross-country during the restoration.. The canoe was re-launched in 2015, back in the water after many years spent as “a project”!

Mary Norton told about their 1905 **Rushton Indian Girl**, for which they traded a free-to-them plastic canoe. Joe began the restoration, removing the fiberglass and stabilizing the hull, while the further work was completed by Mike Elliott, and is featured in his “*This Fancy Old Canoe.*” Mike discussed the actual work involved later in the Meet as a featured speaker.

Barb and Chris Cooper, with friends Cindy Trevor, Denise Caldwell and Bob Needham, and Trevor Jack, came with two canoes, a **Mad River** and the striking white **strip canoe** which Chris found, essentially new, on the Vancouver, B.C. Craigslist. Both bows of the canoe are decorated with Northwest First Nations art designed by famed Haida Gwaii artist/sculptor Bill Reid. One side features a stylized sea otter, and the other side shows a salmon. The large canoe was enjoyed by many people during the Meet.



*Kurt Schmidt discusses the Kennebec canoe whose restoration he completed. Note the bow and stern capped gunwales. Livdahl photo*



Mike Livdahl brought his ballistic nylon-covered 1950's **Old Town Otca**. Mike described early trips with friends, including a noteworthy trip on the windy Handford Reach, describing how well the craft handled with baggage and two large men, yet is nicely maneuverable for a single paddler with camera.

Bob and Carol Podesta came with their **Greenwood**, likely a 1960—1970's canoe. Bill Greenwood was a prolific Vancouver, B.C. builder who worked early in his career in eastern canoe companies, studying their canoes and construction methods. His canoes were based on both Maine Guide and Prospector models, with his own distinctive profile. Canoes were sold finished, with the Greenwood logo, or as unfinished canoes in local sporting stores, without the Greenwood name. Bob reports the canoe has navigated free-style courses nimbly.

Mike Elliott's 16' **Chestnut Pal** was built in 1965, and purchased by Mike in 2010. This canoe graces the cover and some interior photos of his first book, *"This Old Canoe"*. The canoe originated from Fredricton, New Brunswick, on the Saint John river.

Jim Ekins' **Old Town Otca** is a long time family canoe, and the boat he grew up with. The 1925 canoe travelled with the family, from Florida, where Jim grew up, to Ohio, where it was once recanvassed. Most recently it was restored in 1989—1990, and visits many Northwest waters.

What an interesting collection of beautiful canoes, and from so many different builders! What fun to paddle them and compare!



*Paddlers re-embark after portaging the shallow area near the Rainbow Bridge. Norton photo*

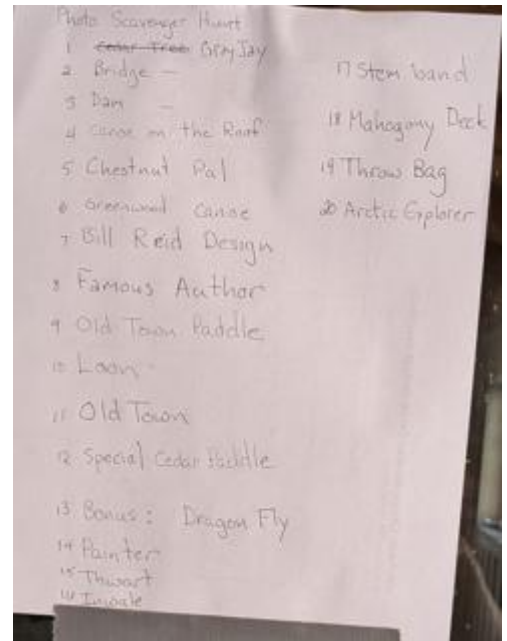


*Campers enjoyed evening campfires, with cold starry nights, arctic-themed poetry readings (including "The Cremation of Sam McGee") and curious jokes emerging from the dark at long intervals. Livdahl photos*

## Scavenger Hunt

On Saturday, rather than canoe games or a regatta, President Mike Livdahl devised a photo scavenger hunt. The group scattered for an entertaining leisurely afternoon to collect photos of the items on the list. Prizes were awarded to the first person collecting all the items--which entailed quite a bit of paddling—and to all those who successfully collected all the items. Special awards were given for imaginative entries (Kurt Schmidt's recording of a loon call, rather than a photo of the loon who dived too soon; Bob Podesta's amazing dragonfly close-up; and several entries that combined many items in one photo.)

Who knew the group had so many famous authors?! We had a fun time on the water.



## Auction !

Saturday afternoon's auction included an eclectic collection of items, including WCHA calendars featuring Mike Elliott and Mike Livdahl, to moose drink coasters, an eagle cutting board, canoe seats, clinching iron and old movies. Auctioneers Mike Elliott and Kurt Schmidt entertained the crowd and raised \$658 from items on the table. Two items topped the auction: Craig Dupler purchased a beautifully crafted cherry wood canoe seat, originally purchased at the 2025 Assembly auction and donated to our auction by Chris Eden. The seat was made by the late Andy Hutyera, and donated to the WCHA auction by his wife, Jackie. The other highly coveted item was a cedar commemorative canoe paddle from the Squamish Nation's 2003 Canoe Journey, carved by Stewart Nahanni, and purchased by Jennifer Eastwood.

Thank you, auction donors, bidders, and auctioneers! The money earned at our auction, plus camping fees, enables the group to cover the costs of the Meet.



Canoe instructor Jennifer Eastwood enjoyed trying the various canoes at the Meet, and generously took time to give paddling lessons to a number of people. Thank you, Jennifer! Livdahl photo



Bob Podesta took 17 week old Monty on his first canoe trips; he proved to be a natural canoe dog. Livdahl photo



Des Winterbottom looks at the chapter history book during the Meet. Livdahl photo



## High Arctic Travel by Chris Cooper

Explorer and adventure traveler Chris Cooper gave the chapter an exciting look at some of his epic expeditions **not** involving canoeing. Chris and various companions have explored Baffin Island, Devon Island and Coburg Island and others in Canada's High Arctic, involving months-long trips in May and June. By July, ice bergs are moving and the ice may be too unstable.

After months of planning and preparation, the crew is usually flown as close as possible to their starting point. Beginning the trip and extrication at the end are completely weather dependent and may be uncertain. At times dog teams or snow machines may be used to move gear, but not in the remote areas. Supplies for expeditions of over a month are then moved on 7' sleds, generally pulled by the explorers themselves on cable-binding skis with skins; occasionally sails can be used. The group generally moves 16—22 K daily, between camp sites.

Camp sites are often made in high winds and blowing snow. Polar bears or their tracks have been seen on the expeditions, but so far, the explorers have not had to utilize the various deterrents they carry. Expedition members may take time out to climb significant peaks, with even more impressive views. Chris' slides offer views into areas so remote few people have ever seen them.

Between expeditions, the details of film editing, planning, sponsorships and care of gear occupy a great deal of time. The environment they traverse is so remote and potentially hazardous that no detail is unimportant. For example, Chris himself consumed 50 kg of chocolate on one trip; a chocolate company soon became a significant expedition sponsor!

Chris and Barb have compiled a beautiful photo book with highlights of 60 years of expeditions, with its second printing available soon. Thank you, Chris, for sharing a glimpse of your exciting life!



*All supplies needed for weeks of high energy/high calorie days and cold weather camping are hauled by sled, on skis. Devon Island, shown here, is mostly ice. Cooper photo*



*The Cooper's book, with amazing photos, will be available for sale soon.*



*Chris Cooper, with Burnett Norton photo*

## Restoring a 1905 Rushton Indian Girl

On Friday, Mike Elliott, author of *"This Old Canoe"*, and its companion book, *"This Fancy Old Canoe"*, discussed the restoration of a 1905 Rushton Indian Girl. Following publication of his first book, Mike had a list of specific canoe features such as alternate construction details, canoe history, long decks, sponsons, etc. not described in that book, that could easily fill a second volume. Interested in working on a canoe with closed gunwales and pocketed inwales, and taking photos of the details, Mike took on the restoration of Mary Norton and Joe McElroy's Rushton.

This Rushton had not had an easy life. Found submerged in a lake in the 1950's and purchased for a dollar by the previous owner's father, it was eventually fiber glassed, and used as a hunting and fishing boat until the canvas and glass was ripped off by a flooded barbed wire fence. Time outdoors in the weather rotted stems and enclosed rib tops. It was finally traded to Joe and Mary for a heavy plastic canoe they had been given. Joe removed the fiber glass, and stabilized the canoe, but restoration was not simple and progress slow. The canoe was transported to Kettle River Canoes.

The canoe's construction details made restoration difficult and painstaking. The closed gunwales trapped water, and had contributed to rotting the rib ends, all of which had to be replaced. New inwales were pocketed for each new rib top, and installed and new outwales steamed and bent. Both canoe ends needed replacement, but enough remained of one stem to provide a pattern, and preserve the canoe's profile. One "deck" was rotted plywood, but the other deck provided a pattern and a custom jig was built to steam and bend new cherry decks. Neither seat survived, but research at the Canadian Canoe Museum provided dimensions, particularly important for the stern high, trapezoidal seat. This presented a unique and time-consuming caning challenge. Finally, a new floor rack was made to replace the original, lost long ago. New paint complements the cherry trim.

The restored Rushton Indian Girl was relaunched at Manning in 2019—a beautiful canoe, and a delight to paddle. Thank you, Mike, for all your research, time and work!



Mike Elliott paddles at Manning in 2025.  
Livdahl photo



The Rushton Indian Girl is re-launched in Lightning Lake at the 2019 Meet. The canoe revisited Manning this year, at 120 years old. Livdahl photo



If you are working on a canoe, you will appreciate the clear descriptions and detailed drawings in these books. A lot of canoe history and information are included.





*(Front row ) K.Bill Clark, Carol Clark, Laura Schmidt, Nancy Douglas, Joan Ellsworth, Mary Norton, Mike Elliott, Cindy Trevor , Jennifer Eastwood, Barb Cooper, Jim Ekins, Mike Livdahl. (Back row) Steve Ellsworth, Des Winterbottom, Bob Podesta with Monty, Chris Eden, Art Baddorf, Craig Dupler, Trevor Jack, Kurt Schmidt, Bob Needham, Denise Caldwell, Chris Cooper. Not seen: dogs Annie Clark, Sean Norton-McElroy, Burnett Cooper. Livdahl photo.*

## Northwest Chapter WCHA, Manning 2025

### Chapter Meeting

Chapter business was discussed at the Friday night campfire at Manning, but a quorum of board members was not present. While a consensus was taken on discussion items, voting decisions were deferred to a **Zoom meeting of the chapter board, held November 11, 2025.**

**Treasurer's report:** Joan noted a treasury balance of \$5,795. We like to keep a balance of the cost of 2 years' Meets, if (as during Covid) there is no fundraising. Manning usually costs between \$800 and \$1,000; this year between the auction and camping fees, we came out even. Camp Bishop costs about \$2,400. Joan recommends keeping a balance of \$5,000.

**Fundraising:** We have been donated Erich Neupert's mother's canoe (Lou Marlowe), a Morris Elliott/Kanaka Canoe Company 14.5' canoe in excellent condition. The canoe has been meticulously hand-painted (on her dining room table!) to appear as birch bark. Joan and Steve have picked it up in California; Craig Dupler will store it for the group. How best to market the canoe, and perhaps keep it within the NW Chapter was discussed.

- Good photos will be taken once the canoe is in Washington.
- Knowledgeable local experts will be asked to appraise the canoe, with a board decision on price via email in January.

- The canoe will be offered to the chapter first, and shown at the Spring Meet. Mike Livdahl will discuss a possible article about it in the WCHA magazine.
- If no one in the chapter is interested, we will put it in the WCHA classified ads.

**Spring Meet: May 8, 9, 10, 2026 at Camp Bishop, Lost Lake, Shelton, WA**

**Fall Meet: September 18,19,20, 21, 2026** at Lone Duck #2 (back to our favorite site), Manning Park, BC. This is reserved in Mike Livdahl's name, which can be changed or cancelled if necessary.

**Possible Meet Speakers:** The group had previously voted to reserve \$1,000 to start a fund to bring in a guest speaker, as we have done occasionally in the past (Michael Grace, Roland Thurlow, etc.) Ken Kelley was suggested. Given the present bank balance, it was decided to not have a paid guest speaker at this time. Mary and Joan will work on the Spring Meet program.

**Charitable Donations:** Based on group consensus at the Meet, the chapter donated \$500 to help in the time sensitive purchase of **the earliest known Willits canoe**, to be placed in the Foss Waterway Seaport Willits display. The Chapter name will appear on the exhibit plaque.

Sue Cross researched options for donations to groups that would further young people's interest in wooden canoes, wood working and boats. Groups she contacted and their needs included:

- Grays Harbor CC Carpentry classes: Tool kits for new students cost \$500
- Center for Wooden Boats: funds could go to school field trips, classes, apprentices, restorations, etc., any amount welcome.
- NW School of Wooden Boatbuilding: class project is to build a skiff: \$3,00—\$6,000
- South Seattle CC boat building: would like a canoe mold to utilize in class.

The board voted to donate **\$500 to Grays Harbor CC Carpentry class**, for an entering student tool kit plus a membership to the WCHA. The carpentry class's help and interest in Camp Bishop was noted. In addition, the NW Chapter will **loan the two-part Cheemaun canoe mold** (donated by late member John Bielenberg) to the SSCC carpentry class plus a WCHA membership, on condition that if a NW member wishes to use it, that can be mutually scheduled. Sue Cross will facilitate these transactions.

**New President:** several people volunteered to be president after the resolution of current life events, but the discussion was tabled while talks are held with possible people for now; new president TBD.



*The hand-painted Neupert/Morris Elliott canoe gets ready to travel to Washington with the Ellsworths, ready for new adventures. Ellsworth photo*



## Willits Gathering 2025 report by Joan Ellsworth

The 4th Annual Willits Gathering was fairly simple. It was held in Gig Harbor, Washington on August 23, 2025. Meeting at the Tacoma Narrows Antique Airplane Museum, the day kicked off with a showing of the Willits documentary movie, **Makers on the Tide**. After lunch, the event moved to the Gig Harbor Marina where 11 Willits canoes paddled in and around watercraft of all shapes, sizes and functionalities. Many onlookers waved and obviously admired the beautiful canoes making their way around the harbor.

Sandy Bates drove all the way from Chicago with his Willits for the 3rd year in a row and poled his canoe around while standing up in it.

Many thanks to Phil Miller for organizing the day and helping to keep the Willits name in the limelight of canoeing adventures.

As an addendum to the above, and forthcoming to Tacoma's Foss Seaport Waterway Museum, the oldest known Willits canoe in existence came to the attention of Pat Chapman, Willits Brothers historian. Pat organized and procured donations totaling \$8000.00 to purchase the canoe for the Foss Museum. It will be displayed in the newly developed Willits recreated "shop" at the Foss Museum.



*(Above left) Gathering attendees admire the beautiful canoes.*

*(Above right) What a special group of canoes! The book-matched stripes of the Ellsworth 1921 canoe stand out in the line-up.*

*(Left) Sandy Bates stands up to pole his Willits. Photos courtesy of Joan and Steve Ellsworth*

# Earliest Known Willits Now at Foss Waterway Seaport!

By Pat Chapman

I'm overjoyed to announce that the fundraising drive to purchase this canoe was successful! Thanks to all of you, we raised enough money to purchase the oldest known Willits canoe and donate it to the Foss Waterway Seaport to be included in their magnificent collection of Willits canoes.

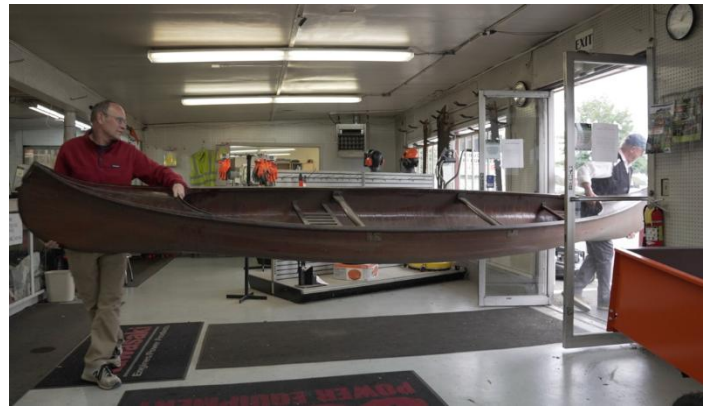
This past Saturday, October 18, 2025, I presented an \$8,000 check from the Foss Waterway Seaport to Duff Jones. After interviewing Duff on camera for possible inclusion of new footage to the documentary film "Makers on the Tide" about the Willits brothers, Michael Sullivan, Mick Flaaen, and I delivered the canoe to Brent Mason, Executive Director of the Foss Waterway Seaport. The canoe is now safely stored at the Seaport until some remodel work is concluded at the Seaport and we can wash, survey, and catalog the canoe. After that's done, the canoe will be on display for public viewing.

We couldn't have saved this treasure without your generous support, and so I can't thank you enough. The total donations exceeded the \$8,000 amount needed to purchase the canoe from Duff, and as you agreed, that excess was used by the Seaport to pay for moving the Willits factory collection to more permanent storage. The Seaport will be sending receipts for your donations very soon. The NW Chapter donated \$500 to this effort.



*The earliest known Willits made an interesting public display item (above, left.)*

*(above, right). On its way out the door, Pat Chapman at the bow. Note the extra long decks!*



*(Right) On its way to Foss Waterway Seaport. photos courtesy of Pat Chapman*







*Trevor Jacks and Denise Needham canoe west on Lightning Lake.  
Livdahl photo*



*Nancy Douglas enjoys the paddle to the end of Lightning Lake.  
Livdahl photo*



*Chris Eden ties on a fly. Livdahl photo*

## **Mark Your Calendar!**

- **Spring Meet: Camp Bishop, Shelton, WA: May 8,9, 10, 2026**
- **Fall Meet: Manning Park, B.C. September 18, 19, 20, 21, 2026**