

# LOLLYSTICKS AND SHAVINGS

It has long been believed that Inuit paddles were made the shape they were due to the size of the pieces of driftwood that were strewn along their shores. We now know that this is not the case. A lot of the timber that fell into the major rivers of the north was carried by the currents and ice and deposited all along the Arctic shorelines. Here they could be collected by the indigenous peoples and used in the manufacture of a variety of different pieces of equipment.

For now we will look at the Greenland style paddle. This tool was required to perform a large number of specific tasks. It needed to right the kayak after a capsize, stabilize the kayak in rough seas or when hunting, to assist a fellow kayaker to right his craft and of course for propulsion. As you can see the Inuit had to use his piece of driftwood for much the same things that we would use our all carbon, wide bladed, feathered, modified crank, lightweight paddles of today.

There are several reasons for the distinctive narrow blade shape.

- It is easier to manufacture
- It is less likely to split or break
- It presents less area to a head wind
- It gave less of an outline for the hunted animal to see
- It was less noisy when hunting

The main reason though was probably one of control; the paddle can be gripped at any point along the blade.

For this tool to be suitable for all these applications it had to conform to a formula of sizing, so that no matter the stature of the kayaker his personally made paddle would be correct for him. Basically there are two types of Greenland paddle, the cruising and the storm paddle.

The formula for working the size of the cruising paddle is:

Overall length of paddle: arm span plus the length from the elbow to the fingertips (which equates to standing with outstretched arms and the fingers hooked over the blade).

Length of shaft or grip: arms held out in front of the body and parallel to each other.

Size of grip: thumb and index finger touching and made into an oval.

Width of blade: thumb and index finger made into an upright "C".

The difference in size of the storm paddle as compared to the cruising paddle is that the shaft length is the width of your hands and not your shoulders.

<b><u>Paddler Height</u></b>	<b><u>Length</u></b>	<b><u>Shaft</u></b>	<b><u>Grip</u></b>	<b><u>Blade</u></b>	<b><u>Storm Length</u></b>
5'	6'6"	13.5"	1.5"x1"	3"	5'6"
5'2"	6'8"	14"	1.5"x1"	3"	5'7"
5'4"	6'10"	14"	1.75"x1"	3"	5'9"
5'6"	7'	14"	1.75"x1"	3.5"	5'11"
5'8"	7'2"	15"	1.75"x1"	3.5"	6'
5'10"	7'4"	15.5"	1.75"x1"	3.5"	6'2"
6'	7'6"	16"	2"x1.25"	4"	6'4"
6'2"	7'8"	17"	2"x1.25"	4"	6'6"

**Table of Sizes**

To make a paddle of your own you will require a piece of wood approximately 8' long 4" by 2" section. If you can select your own timber then choose a straight grained, knot free plank. A saw, plane and sand paper are the minimum tools that are required although the task will be easier if you have access to other woodworking tools such as a power planer, band saw, circular saw and spokeshave.

Assuming that your piece of wood is straight and square, first of all mark the centre lines on all four sides of your paddle to be, then using the plan as a guide, trace the outline onto this making sure it is centred correctly. Now take your chosen saw and cut around the outside of your line. Your plank will now look like a paddle but is just a bit on the thick side. Whether you choose to saw or plane the blades to shape is up to you, personally I prefer to use a power planer as this removes a lot of material quickly and makes a lot of mess, my workshop is usually knee deep in shavings by this point! By using the plan as a guide to profiles and with a bit more care and a hand plane, remove more and more wood from the paddle until it begins to take shape. It is important to balance both blades as having one blade heavier than the other will make paddling awkward. A greater degree of care must now be taken not to remove too much from your nearly finished paddle, from here sandpaper of increasing fineness should be used to finish shaping the blades. When you are satisfied that you have the required shape and finish, wet the paddle and allow to dry, (this raises any grain that is lying down) and give a final rub down with smooth sandpaper.

The finish on the paddle is a matter of choice. Varnish looks nice and protects the wood, but it needs to be maintained. Water can get underneath, and cause damage if not spotted and rectified immediately. Also the varnish does not allow the hands to perspire and the finish is unbelievably slippery and will make more than a fool out of you. If left as you have finished it, it will deteriorate very quickly, so a good idea is to mix wood preservative and linseed oil and apply this concoction over the whole paddle. The first time you use the paddle, if you use this method of protection, will be just the same as if your hands were covered in suntan cream, but this soon wears off and leaves a good grippy finish.

Now that you have finished your masterpiece, take it outside, show it the water and learn how to use it. You will probably find that you cannot accelerate as quickly as if you were using modern paddles, but that you can cruise at the same speed and use less energy to do so. There are certainly benefits to be had from this type of paddle - so give it a go.

By Gordon Brown