

The Art of Arctic Woodworking subtitles

L: Hello! My name is Linda Jeschke and I'm a Park Ranger here in Northwest Alaska. Our four national parks in this region - Kobuk Valley National Park, Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Noatak National Preserve, and Bering Land Bridge National Preserve - are based out of the Northwest Arctic Heritage Center... this building right here in Kotzebue, Alaska.

We are lucky to have three amazing pieces by local builder James McClellan and his family. Because our parks here in the Arctic support subsistence living, many of the materials that James uses for his kayaks, umiaks, and dog sleds actually come from our parks! And now I'd like to introduce James and Sally McClellan.

S: I'm Sally McClellan, James' wife...What's your name?

J: James McClellan.

S: And you're a builder.

J: Mhmm

S: _____(the last?) *Can skip this subtitle on the film*

J: Work all day and probably almost quit about ten or eleven o'clock at night.

S: You stop for supper and then go back.

J: Eat little bit, rest little bit, then go again.

The Building Process (1:14)

R: Okay, so the first thing you do is get the wood.

J: Mhmm

R: Right and for kayaks and umiaks it's driftwood spruce.

J: mhmm

R: And for sleds its hickory, from the building supply store.

J: Yeah.

R: When you have the wood, uhmm, the next thing you do is chop it.

J: Yeah. I cut it up with, with saw and skill saws.

R: Skill saws, okay. And, is that, do you do that outside?

J: Mhmm

R: Okay. And then after you chop it up, you limb it, right?

J: Yeah, I shape it, and, you know, smooth it up, plane it, and then after that, I steam it to bend.

R: Mhmm

J: And then start putting it together.

R: After it's dry, what do you do?

J: I tie it, tie together, and then after I get done tying it, it's done, and I oil it.

R: Okay.

Building Umiaks (2:28)

R: What is, what is this?

J: Umiak frame. Umiaks. This is all made out of spruce wood, drift wood. Those ends there, and the middle part is made all them ribs for all spruce wood, shape it.

S: Yeah, all drift wood.

J: That'll hold eight people.

Building Kayaks (3:06)

J: That's the roots of a tree there, so wide we split them like that in half; shape 'em. We always put skins on them with seal hide, real good. They're always be light [weight] in kind, easier to handle.

Building Dog Sleds (3:30)

J: That's a dog sled

S: Yeah, that's a dog sled, from the size of it, that's the kind that dogs would pull.

R: Do you build a lot of sleds that are this size, or bigger?

J: Yeah

S: bigger ones now

J: Bigger ones, mostly for snow machines now.

R: Mhmm

J: They drag them right behind the snow machine. Yah, them parts are made of hickory hardwood, they're easy to bend see? Shape like that.

S: Yeah, lots of hardwood, and it lasts longer

J: You gotta steam it. Steam it and then put it on a, uhmm, a form. And leave it set overnight.

J: Up the river

R: up the Noatak?

J: The Noatak Borough. Right above my camp area

S: Because it had to be long enough, and some of the wood would drift down, but your chance of having that long a piece drift down, but it was drift wood anyway. But up the river, there are places where there is drift wood, and then you can look through the drift wood depositories, almost as though somebody put the wood there, and find exactly what you need.

J: When I was about 19, 18, something like that, the elders was show me this, show me that, and I learned a lot from him. And he was being trusted making kayaks and I always just watch him

R: Mmm

J: 'Cause there was be lots of drift wood across there alone the beach.

R: Mhmm

J: I do, I do the easy parts and when I was kinda young, and he always tell me to do this and do that and soak that wood in the water, the salt water in the ocean and it won't break so easy.

R: Your mother also helped work on these too, she helped sew?

J: Oh, she uhm, she's the one that always put skin on

R: Okay

J: after the uhm, she gotta take the hair out, let them sit in the oil for a while, and the hair always peel off

R: You and your father build this sled together?

J: Mhmm, took us a couple days I guess. Two, three days.

(5:15)

J: That's the way I make my gas money...

R: By building

J: And ever since I've been building sleds all the time. But I'm really slowing down. I got no more ___ for them. You want a sled you make it yourself. That's what I say.