



A Canoe Story

Sweat, Blood and Instruments of Death

By Vincent Hempall

For most people, canoeing conjures up serene images of paddling at dusk, listening to the mournful cries of a loon, and meandering down quiet rivers and across peaceful lakes. But after building my first cedar-strip canoe, I now associate Canada's favorite outdoor recreation with sweat, blood, and instruments of death.

The differences between travelling in a canoe and building one are staggering. Think about it: "paddling, dipping and floating" compared to "sawing, stapling and hacking." And it's hard to believe this peaceful mode of transportation requires tools with such frightful names as spoke shaves, staple guns, epoxy hardeners, and Dozuki saws in its construction. (Basically a Dozuki is all blade. Three hundred tiny, sharp, serrated teeth attached to four inches of bamboo handle. If ever I started up a canoe building

business, I could run a torture chamber on the side.)

Before we began, I envisioned heading into the back woods, pitching a tent, and hollowing out a tree while plump trout jumped in the background. But instead we set up in the basement of master canoe builder Roger Foster, and he, in turn, gave us a mould, the tools, the guidance and the bandages.

It didn't take long for me to realize the construction process can be rather discouraging. Glue on one cedar strip, cut it down. Glue on another cedar strip. Cut it off. Punch in a staple. Take it out. Slap on some fiberglass. Sand it down. It seems every time we attached something, we had to take a good part of it off.

After treating many a bleeding callous, I came to the conclusion there is a similarity between paddling a canoe and building one. It's all hands-on. No motors, no fuel lines, no



robots. I was caning a seat by hand when a colleague said, "It reminds me of macramé. That's so cute." Let's get one thing straight, it may be intricate, but there's nothing "cute" about building a canoe. It's hard work. It's labor intensive. It's pre-politically correct manly. We used sharp tools and got very dirty. If a paddler is a ballet dancer, the canoe builder is the hard core construction working

cousin. And it wasn't until we bent the last cedar strip into place, fighting against every force of nature and physics to fit it in, that we fully appreciated what a satisfying experience it is. Then we looked outside and realized it was snowing and we'd have to wait another three months before we could ever use the thing. Talk about torture.

ILLUSTRATION: GUY PARSONS

MYSTERY TOOL



TOOLS COURTESY G. GOULDBURN, PHOTOGRAPHY: SIMON CHEUNG

HEAVE, HO!

Peter Wilkinson of Windsor, Ont. was the only reader to correctly identify the pit saw "box" or handle (top left) featured in December's "Mystery Tool".

Pit saws were used to cut logs into boards. The log was laid over a pit with one man on top pulling the saw up and another in the pit pulling the saw down.

The box has a cut at the centre to accept the blade, with space on both sides for a wedge that secures the box to the saw. To remove the box, simply knock out the wedge.

Fifty dollars will go to one reader drawn from all entrants who correctly identify February's mystery tool (left). Deadline is February 15, 1996.