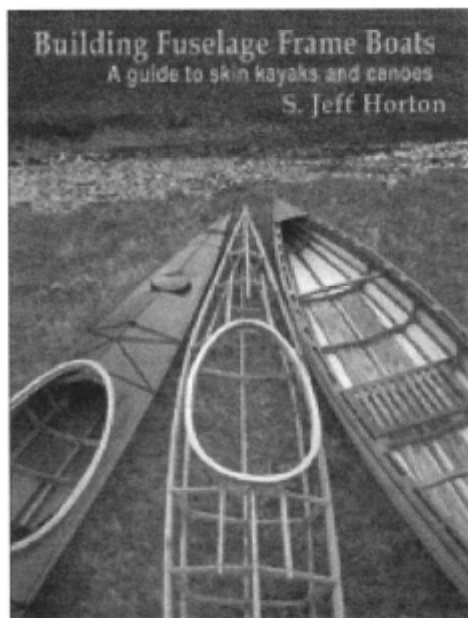


BOOKS

Book Review

**Building Fuselage Frame Boats** By S. Jeff Horton

Reviewed by David Eden



I suppose nearly everyone who has an interest in kayaking and the people of the Arctic has dreamed of building his or her own boat at some point. I know I have. Over the years, I have collected a small library of skin-on-frame books and am always delighted when a new one comes along that I like enough to add to my shelves. The new book by S. Jeff Horton, *Fuselage Frame Boats, A Guide to Building Skin Kayaks and Canoes* (The Kudzupatch Inc., paperback, 148 pages, \$18.95) certainly fulfills that.

A fuselage frame boat essentially uses the same method of construction as

early airplane bodies: a series of graduated frames cut as solid pieces from marine grade plywood with thin wooden stringers to provide shape and rigidity for the body. Horton states in his introduction, "The style was very popular in the 1950s and 1960s and many boat plans appeared in magazines such as *Popular Mechanics* and *Popular Science*." This is not traditional Inuit or Aleut construction, by any means. It is, in fact, the way that many folding kayaks are constructed. Horton has you building light-weight, relatively inexpensive boats quickly to get out on the water as soon as may be. There is little or no history or philosophical meanderings. Read, build in as little as 100 hours, and paddle!

Horton starts in with a description of terms and a discussion of tools. The latter is one very pleasant surprise to those familiar with other books on building skin-o-frame boats. The intimidatingly huge collection of adzes, draw knives, and other esoteric or antique tools (Did you ever try finding any of these at the local hardware store? "Go around to the local antique stores and you may have some luck," one clerk advised me.) can be enough to scare off any but the most dedicated traditionalist. Horton's book is obviously designed for boaters whose main concern is to get out on the water, but who would enjoy building their own boat. Like the 1950s magazines he mentions, Horton assumes that anyone with a minimum of tools and some basic

skills can build his boats.

The construction process does require the building of a special frame, called the strongback, before work on the boat can begin. This may seem excessive to the eager builder who, steeped in misconceived native lore, thinks that he or she can simply hop in and do it. However, the strongback is essential to an accurate and easy build.

The book includes plans and directions for building two kayaks and a canoe. The plans are in the form of lofting directions, which are a little intimidating at first. They are list of points with offset measurements to define the outlines of the frames. I tested the procedure using a piece of cardboard and found that it was actually quite simple, once I understood the process, which is fully illustrated and explained by Horton. It is a connect-the-dots process, with the numbers indicating the position of each dot on a flat surface, in my case, cardboard. For those uncertain of their own abilities, Horton does offer full-size plans for these and other boats on his website, [www.kudzucraft.com](http://www.kudzucraft.com). He recommends that the frame images be cut out and glued to the plywood before cutting, and I think this is a good idea for lofters, as well. It is much easier to draw the frames on paper, adjust lines and make erasures, than to work directly on the plywood.

I recommend this book highly to anyone who is interested in building a skin-on-frame boat.