

EDITOR'S NOTE: Brian has been studying Greenland paddles and paddling for a long time.

Last spring, when he was on the east coast visiting his mother, he attended the Traditional Inuit Paddlers of the Southeast's symposium in Aiken, South Carolina.

TRADITIONAL INUIT PADDLERS OF THE SOUTHEAST

by Brian Hunter

Traditional Inuit Paddlers of the Southeast (TIPS) is

an annual kayak gathering that brings Greenland Style paddling to the southeastern United States. Novice to expert paddlers get together to learn and teach paddling strokes, maneuvers and rolling techniques, and to appreciate the ingenuity of the type of equipment used for thousands of years by Greenland hunters.

BRIAN'S REPORT: On May 15-17, 2015, I attended the 2nd Annual Traditional Inuit Paddlers of the Southeast (TIPS) retreat near Columbia, South Carolina. It was a Qajaq USA event featuring two exceptional and world renown Greenland style paddlers, Chris Crowhurst and Dubside.

Uncle Dave, a Qajaq USA volunteer, brought six skin-on-frame qajaqs, about a dozen Greenland paddles and several different sizes of tuilik ("doo-ee-leek"), which are Inuit style spray skirts with a hood and arms.



The author,
back right with a paddle

Qajaq USA is an organization dedicated to preserving some of the traditions and techniques used by the Inuit, and to raise awareness about the roots of the paddling activity that many enjoy: www.qajaqua.org



Also provided were several avataq ("av-ah-tock"), the sealskin flotation bladders that are attached to a harpoon. There were even some harpoons.

This gear was from the Qajaq USA collection; it travels to different Inuit style events around the United States. The participants were encouraged to try all the different equipment and received instruction on their proper fit and use.



The norsaq, or harpoon throwing stick, used to launch the harpoon is under the harpoon hidden on the far side of this paddler. Norsaqs are also used in several variations of emergency rolls.

One of the instructors, Chris Crowhurst, said in his blog, "I liked how TIPS de-emphasized rolling and provided opportunities for forward stroke development, maneuvering, harpoon throwing, ropes and paddle making, as well as presentations on history, Greenland competition, etc."

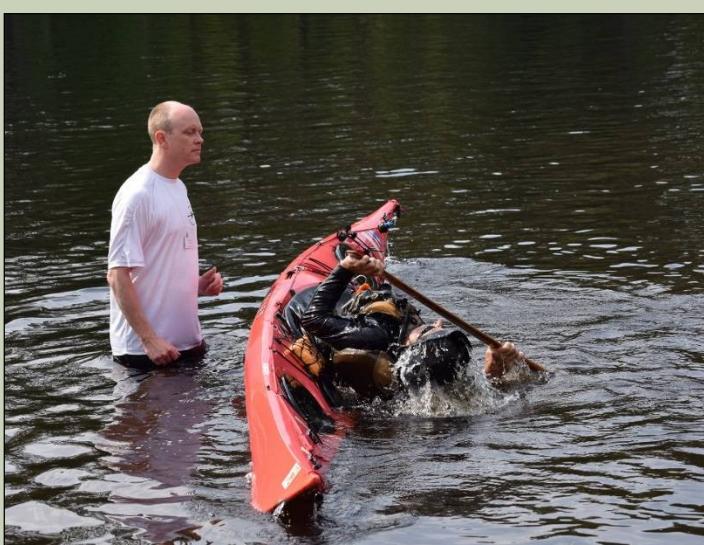
This really allowed the attendees to get a rounded view of Greenland style kayaking."

HARPOON THROWING PRACTICE

There were classes in using the Greenland style paddle, often called a "stick," and many other subjects. Harpoon throwing was one of them.



In this picture you can see the harpoon in the air and the norsaq in the paddler's right hand.



The instruction by Chris, Dubside and Uncle Dave was truly excellent; every participant I spoke to was thrilled with the training and learned new skills or improved existing ones.

ROLLING LESSONS

But rolling is a life-or-death skill for hunters in the Arctic's icy waters, and it was a big part of the symposium. There were classes on the many different types of Inuit rolls from beginner to advanced "combat" rolls.



Learning the hand roll with Chris Crowhurst

Dubside [no last name] travels all over the US to demonstrate rolling, and the rope gymnastics that are used to teach rolling skills where the water is too cold to practice them in the ocean, and he competes in and judges rolling contests in Greenland.

He's amazing; check out a rolling exhibition: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_8Lh6ldWng

Or a rope demonstration: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URONCFjKOjo>



YOGA

Both mornings of the event started with yoga for qajaqing. It was the first time many of us (including me) had ever tried it.

After those two sessions I am convinced that yoga can improve qajaqing skills by stretching and strengthening the muscles used in paddling. I believe it is especially useful for rolling qajaqs.

IMPROVING BALANCE



Trying to paddle a balance board



Playing around on three boards

MAKING GREENLAND PADDLES



Paddle making seminar



Brian demonstrated his portable work bench and how he glues up his paddles.

There were 21 participants at the second annual TIPS from all around the US, and one from Mexico who was a German citizen. Skill levels varied from novice to those performing rolls with a brick in one hand.

We all went away feeling grateful for the new paddlers we met and the skills we learned or improved.
Many of us will cross paths again at other Qajaq USA paddle events.



Early morning serenity at Aiken, South Carolina