

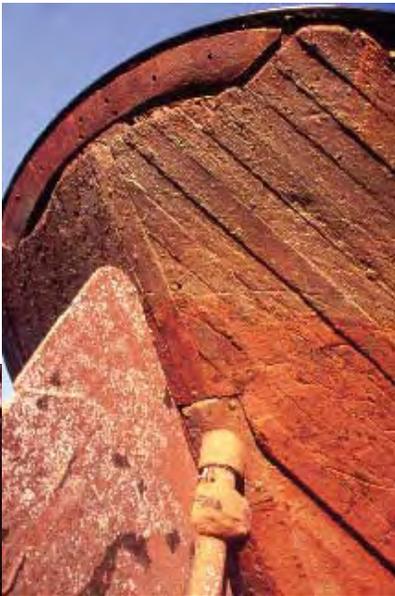
# A Fascination with Boats

by Joyce Gustafson

The massive wooden rudder of the Foss fleet's first tugboat, *Elf*, the thunderous propeller of the fishing boat, *Mienke*, and Rob Smith attending to seams on the *Beryl E*, a SE Alaskan fish tender which hasn't missed a season since its 1925 launching, remind me of a kinship I share with people who have worked on boats for centuries.

In Yorkshire, England, a birch wood paddle was discovered in an ancient lake

bed. The oar was carbon dated to eight thousand, seven hundred years before Christ. As I read about the oar, I imagine a prehistoric woodworker in animal skins paddling silently. His great wooden oar dripping water from the shallow lake that would become a Yorkshire bog. Who is he? What did his boat look like? And what were Stone Age people doing messing around in boats?







My guess is they were doing the same things on their boats that we do on ours. Working. Fishing. Harvesting food. Thinking of ways to build stronger oars, better tools, bigger boats. But I like to think our ancestors were also enjoying themselves on the water: a bit of rest, glad to be away from difficult in-laws, home repairs and prowling predators (telemarketers come to mind).

I don't suggest our lives today are the same as in the Mesolithic Age but some things never change. Man's fascination with boats and attraction to water remain ageless.

What is it about boats? Why do we build boats? Why do we spend time and money we don't have to keep boats?

To me there is something about the way boats alter my perception of time.

Boating requires attentiveness but it also encourages reverie. The two combined put me in a state of alertness that is both stimulating and relaxing. I surrender the tendency to plan and organize *my* time. What is, is "right now."

Looking at the wooden schooner, *Alcyon*, I imagine myself living in an age when wind ruled the empire instead of fossil fuel.



All these photographs evoke different reasons why I love boats, it is perhaps the image of the young girl floating her tiny sailboat on the sea that speaks to me the

most. In the child's gentle launching of the little boat with the blue sail I am witness to an act of wonder, a dusting of ordinary life with a sprinkle of magic as the little boat floats, "Let the adventure begin!"

The image reminds me that boats can take us to places, both real and imagined, not otherwise available. Like portals to a world of dreams, boats take us where animals outnumber people and where

the elements rule. Boats free us from our leaden feet. They lend wings to our flight and cradle us in the mesmerizing movement of water.

Boats remind us of added dimensions to our lives: the profundity of water, the brilliance of night skies and horizons so vast that sea and sky blend into one—blurring our perception of the world we cherish. ▶